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AUGUST 2018 VOL 29 NO 11

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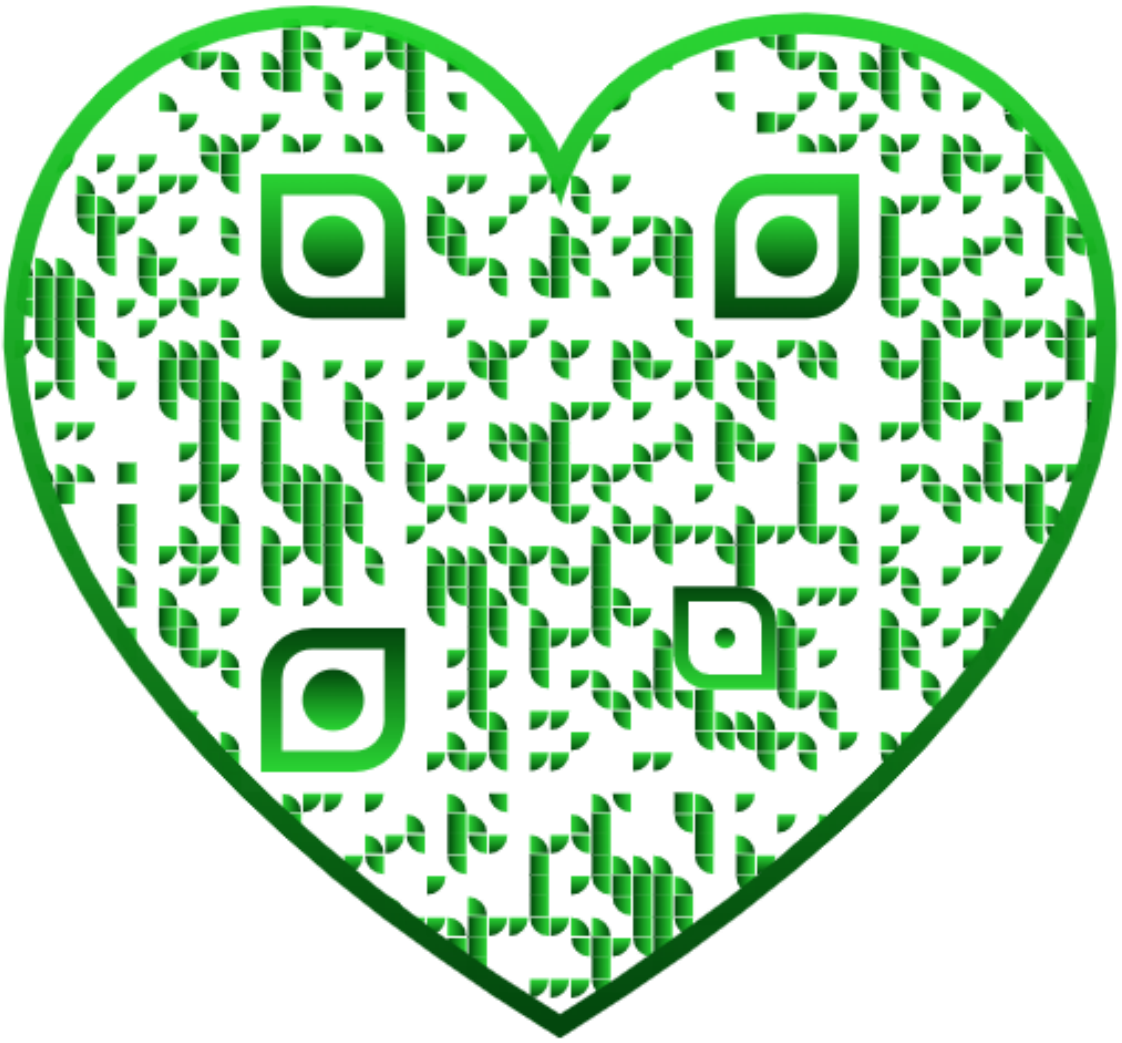

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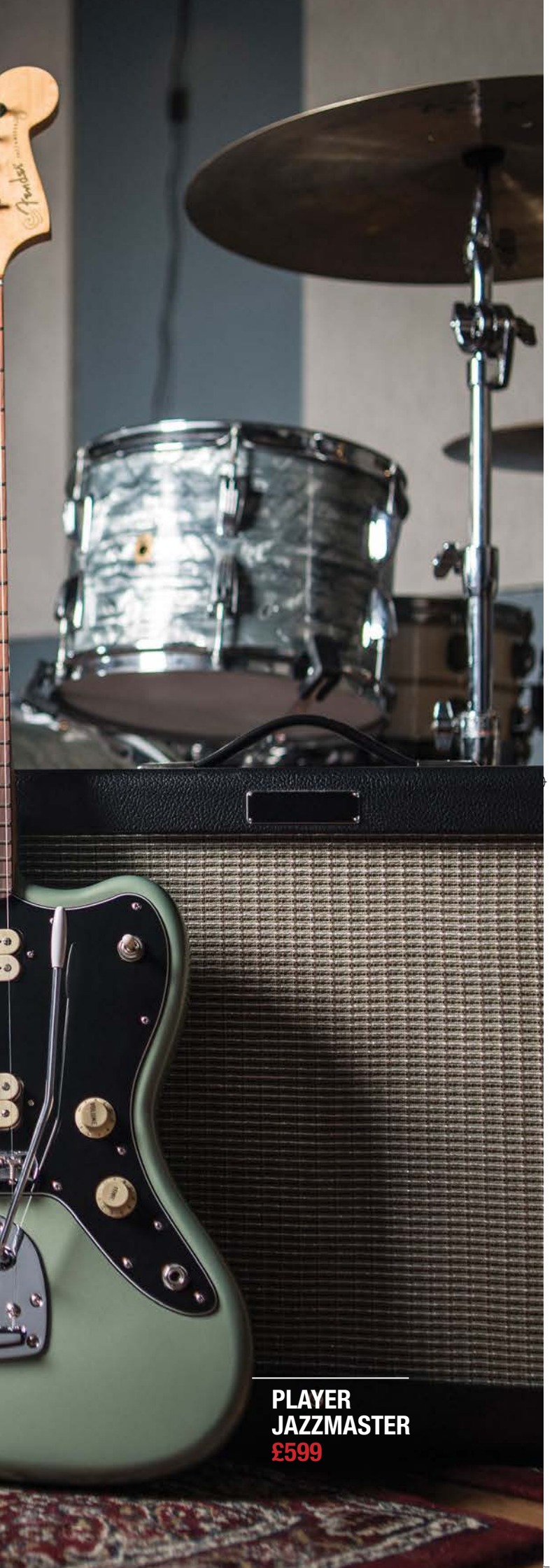

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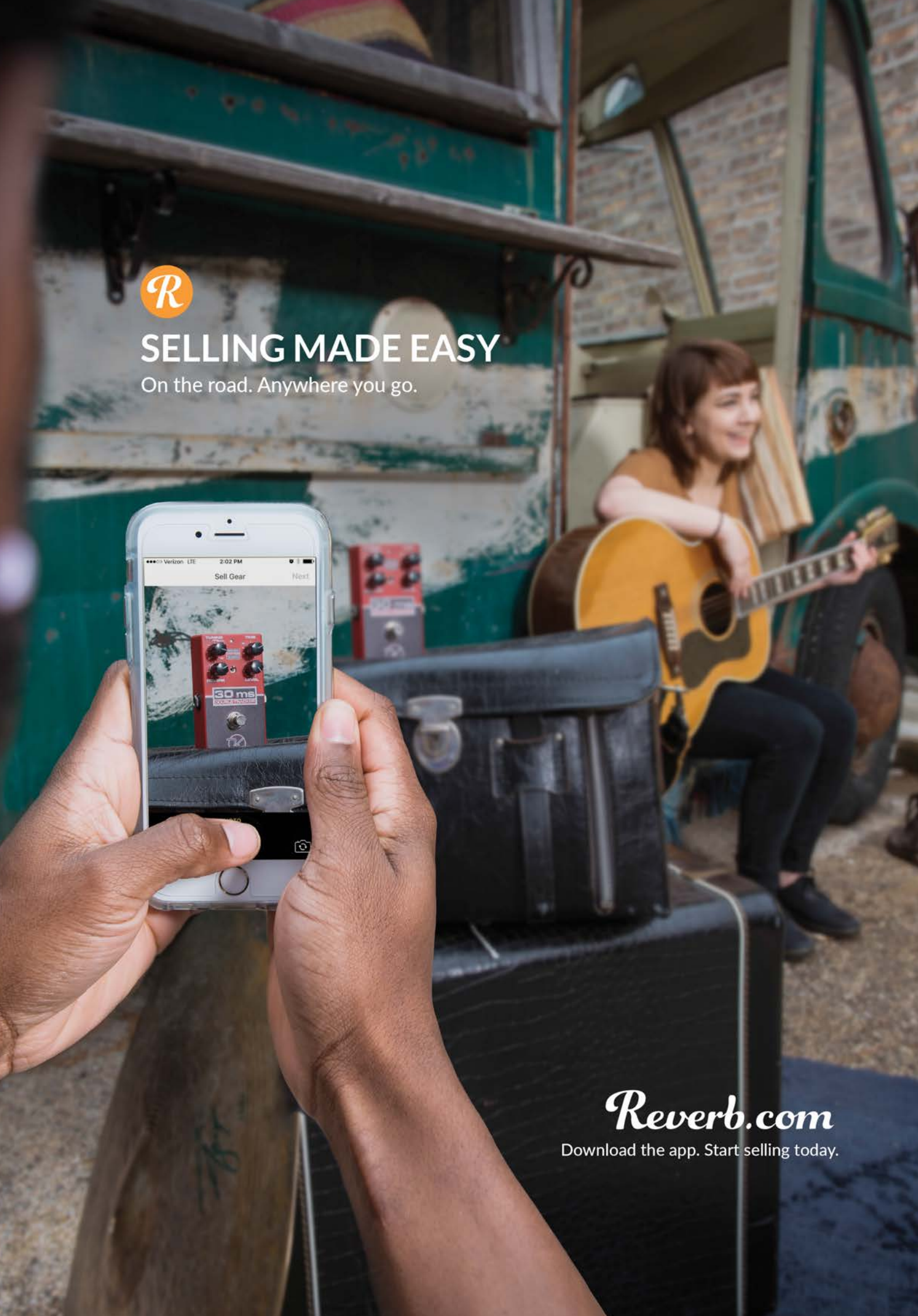
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Anthem Publishing
Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road,
Bath BA1 6PL
Tel **+44 (0) 1225 489984**
Email
theguitarmagazine@anthem-publishing.com

www.theguitarmagazine.com

Editor **Chris Vinnicombe**
chris.vinnicombe@anthem-publishing.com

Art Editor **John Thackray**
john.thackray@anthem-publishing.com

Managing Editor **Josh Gardner**
josh.gardner@anthem-publishing.com

Senior Product Specialist **Huw Price**
huw.price@anthem-publishing.com

Digital Editor **Sam Roberts**
sam.roberts@anthem-publishing.com

Contributors **Darran Charles, Rod Fogg, Thea de Gallier, Bob Hewitt, Dave Hunter, Lars Mullen, Dan Orkin, Richard Purvis, Michael Watts, Bill Weaving**

Instrument & Cover Photography
Eleanor Jane

Managing Director **Simon Lewis**
simon.lewis@anthem-publishing.com

ADVERTISING

Business Development Manager **Di Marsh**
di.marsh@anthem-publishing.com

Advertising Manager **Joe Supple**
joe.supple@anthem-publishing.com

Ad Production **Craig Broadbridge**
craig.broadbridge@anthem-publishing.com

ANTHEM PUBLISHING

CEO **Jon Bickley**
jon.bickley@anthem-publishing.com

Creative Director **Jenny Cook**
jenny.cook@anthem-publishing.com

Marketing & Production Manager **Verity Travers**
verity.travers@anthem-publishing.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION

Print **William Gibbons & Sons Ltd**
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5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU
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LICENSING

Regina Erak **07753 811622**
erak@globalworks.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

shop.anthem-publishing.com
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Like buses...

I recently received one or two letters from readers asking for more coverage of affordable guitars in the magazine and the cogs began to whir in my brain. How do we define value for money when it comes to musical instruments? Is it simply all about depreciation when the time comes to flip it and move on? If it is then a high-end guitar that holds its value – or a vintage piece that appreciates while you own it – might offer better value for money than a more affordable £899 guitar that's worth £400 two years later. Or what about that guitar you coughed up a grand for 10 years ago that's done a few hundred gigs? That's paid for itself many times over by now, surely?

However you slice it, one of our main objectives here at *The Guitar Magazine* – while undoubtedly fanning the flames of your enthusiasm for killer gear both old and new – is to save you money. Aside from our regular maintenance tips and DIY projects designed to save you an expensive trip to your local luthier, this month's vintage collection on p22 provides a fascinating insight into how it's possible to trade up to your dream vintage guitar without selling your house to finance it. It's not all buying tips, though – the article also contains a 1949 ES-300N with one of the best flametops you'll ever set eyes on, so consider yourselves warned.

Finally, as you'll have navigated our special edition cover to get to this letter, you'll doubtless be aware of Fender's new Player series. You wait for ages for Fender to overhaul its reasonably priced Mexican Standard series and then 21 brand new instruments turn up at once... turn to p8 to read our review of four new models from the range that definitely tick the 'affordable' box. I hope you enjoy this month's mag – see you next time.

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of The Guitar Amp Handbook, Guitar Effects Pedals, Amped and The Fender Telecaster. Check out his column on p24

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and Nick Cave. His book, Recording Guitar & Bass, was published in 2002, leading into his career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps & pedals

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker

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We get hands-on with Fender's brand new, affordable Player series – trust us, you're going to want one

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PLAYER POWER

The past two years have seen Fender reinvent its American Standard series as American Professional and American Vintage as American Original. Now the company's attention turns to its entry-level models as we say adios to the popular Mexican Standards and hola to the Player series...

STORY **CHRIS VINNICOMBE**

Walk into any pub in the Western world and – assuming that it hasn't recently been turned into an artisanal gin bar staffed by Victorian strongman lookalikes with a strict cassette-only music policy – if there's a band playing on stage then it's more likely than not that someone will be playing a Mexican-made Fender electric guitar. Or a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe. Or both.

To say these are products that are part of the staple diet for the grassroots gigging musician is an understatement. We all know the story: our first guitar was a borderline-unplayable nylon-string acoustic, then we graduated to a Squier Strat while making a teenage racket in the garage. It was perfectly functional but the allure of the 'real thing' was strong. We just

With a two-point vibrato, a bridge tone control, a 9.5-inch 'board radius and headstock-end truss rod adjustment, this is very much a Strat for the pragmatic, modern player

had to have *that* iconic logo on the headstock, didn't we?

Although the funky Duo-Sonic and Mustang models in the Offset series that arrived back in 2016 represent a hip and very reasonably priced entry point into the catalogue, not everybody shopping for their first Fender wants a compact, short-scale instrument. Just ahead of Summer NAMM 2018, Fender has decided that the time is right to reimagine its entire Ensenada-made Standard line, last overhauled back in 2011. Enter the new Player series.

"The Player series is the entry price point to the Fender brand if you're looking for a traditional Strat, Tele, P-Bass, Jazzmaster et cetera," says Justin Norvell, Senior Vice President of Fender Products. As well as ticking all the 'first serious guitar' boxes for musicians taking a step up from a beginner's instrument, Norvell also believes that the Player series will be a hit with "pros looking for a backup axe, bassists looking to dabble with fretless or five-string, and modders that want a great base platform."

"The main thing is that so many upgrades are subtle," Norvell notes. "One could look

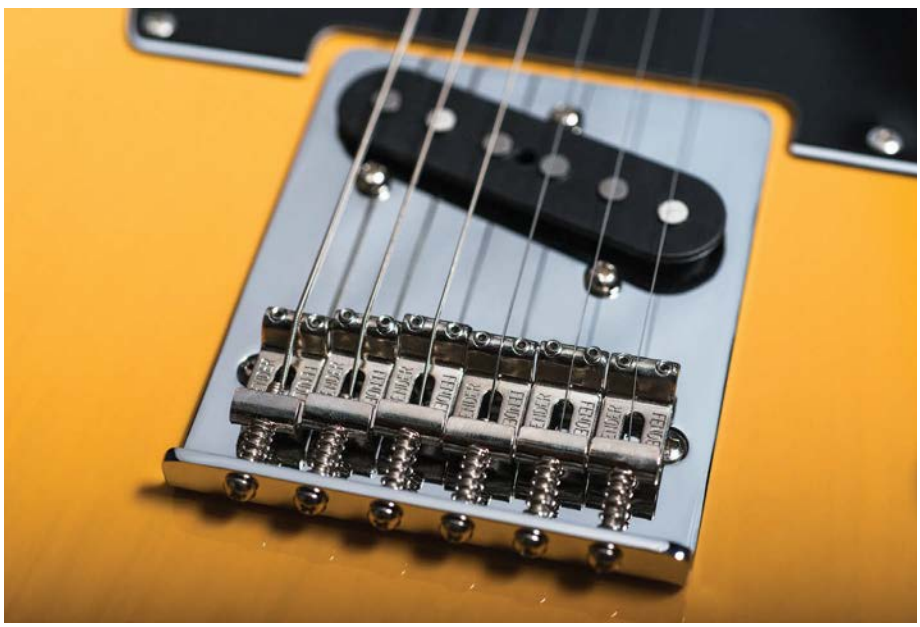
IT'S RARE THAT A £599 ELECTRIC ENDS UP BEING SO DAMN HARD TO PUT DOWN

at it from arm's length and think it looks the same... but literally everything is changed!" With that in mind, then, it's time for us to take a closer look...

With 21 different models in the Player series, and over 90 different variations when you throw finish options into the mix, there's an awful lot to take in here. The expected Strat, Tele, Precision and Jazz are accompanied by HSS, HSH, Plus Top, HSS Plus Top and Floyd Rose Stratocasters, a HH Telecaster, a Jaguar, Jazzmaster, Jaguar Bass and fretless and five-string Jazz Basses. On top of all that there are a total of eight models available for lefties (Strat, Tele, J and P-Bass with either maple or pau ferro fingerboards) and the whole Player range is priced competitively with MSRPs between £549 and £789.

Aside from new Modern C necks with classic 'spaghetti' headstock logos across the range and 22 medium-jumbo frets on all six-string electric models, the Player models come equipped with more curvaceous bodies with improved radii, new hardware, an attractive palette of vibrant new finishes and perhaps most significantly, upgraded pickups featuring alnico magnets.

"The Standard models had slightly hot and dark ceramic bar magnet pickups that we felt didn't really bring out all the nuance, personality and clarity that a Fender is known for, but they did perform well with higher gain sounds," explains Norvell. "Therefore, we

The Telecaster keeps things relatively classic on the looks front, though the six bent steel saddles on the bridge are an addition that recalls recent American Standard models

knew we wanted to step up to a more complex alnico pickup, while also retaining some hotness and output, so we went with alnico Vs on most guitars and a few have IIs. We went through several months of shooting out pickups and probably a dozen sets until we were happy."

CLOSE ENCOUNTER

As the approaching flotilla of cardboard boxes darkened the horizon at *The Guitar Magazine* HQ, we dutifully rolled up our sleeves and set about reviewing all 94 permutations of the Player series. Alright, we didn't really do that, or we'd still be writing his long after the magazine had appeared in your hands! What we did instead was select four models that provide a good cross-section of the range, whether your tastes lean towards traditional six-string electrics, classic offset models with a twist or deep vibrations of the bass variety.

First up in its Sonic Red livery is the Player Stratocaster. It's a familiar combination but what sets it apart from the vintage-style Hank and file is a 22-fret, CITES-friendly pau ferro fingerboard (other finish options are available with maple 'boards, see spec for full rundown) and two-point vibrato. If you are reading this and breaking out in a cold sweat at the idea of a Strat with 22 frets and a two-point vibrato then Fender already makes reasonably priced Stratocasters for you, and they can be found in the Classic Series.

The Strat's fingerboard edges and fret ends are a little sharp, but as these are early review samples that haven't all spent time on a tech's bench, we'll give Fender the benefit of the doubt – especially as the Tele and P-Bass have a much softer and more broken-in feel, while the Jazzmaster is somewhere in-between.

Resplendent in a reassuringly familiar and pleasingly translucent Butterscotch Blonde, the Player Telecaster's appearance is another pragmatic mixture of eras, while the six bent-steel bridge saddles mean the overall look is reminiscent of the recently superseded American Standard Telecaster. The glossy black Precision Bass blends the timeless

The Jazzmaster strips out the complex switching and adds humbuckers and notched bridge saddles

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simplicity of one of the all-time great designs with a slinky, easy-playing neck while the achingly cool Sage Green Metallic Jazzmaster goes out of its way to annoy the purists with Jagmaster-style stripped-down controls and a pair of alnico II humbuckers with a coil split accessible via a push-pull tone control.

All three six-strings on test have slim Modern C shaped necks with a very flat-feeling combination of 9.5inch radius boards and medium-jumbo fretwire. The Jazzmaster's neck is approximately the same depth as those of its stablemates but feels slightly fuller in terms of profile – it's nicely rounded and the pick of the bunch here. All three fingerboards feature extensions to accommodate a 22nd fret, while truss-rod adjustment on Player series instruments happens at the headstock end, behind the synthetic bone nut. Not having to pop the neck off to tighten or loosen the truss-rod is a boon for touring musicians moonlighting as their own guitar tech while travelling through shifting climate conditions.

The gloss urethane finish on Player series headstock fascias (and the Telecaster's maple board) avoids the anaemic look of some older Mexican Standard instruments, while the smooth satin finish around the back of each instrument's neck has a contemporary, drag-free feel. For those with small hands, younger players and guitarists moving over to bass, the neck dimensions of a 50s-style Precision can sometimes be tough to get around, but there are no such problems with the svelte Player series model – although the G-string saddle on our review sample is prone to wandering a little when the string is hit hard, it's otherwise tough to find fault with such a simple, keenly priced workhorse bass.

The Precision's svelte neck will suit younger players, or guitarists switching over

PLUGGED IN

When amplified, the Precision immediately offers a very direct and slightly hi-fi version of the classic P-Bass sound. Playing the hell out those clanky new strings certainly helps, and as ever a foam mute under the strings down by the bridge is the passport to woodier and more authentic 50s and 60s tones. Although it offers less girth and punch than the mid-2000s American Vintage model we use as a benchmark, it still unmistakably delivers *that* sound and you can make it work in the context of almost every genre imaginable.

Humbuckers in a Fender electric can sometimes be a disappointing compromise that stifles the natural bite and jangle of a bolt-on, leaving you with a rather blunt instrument. Here, the marriage is much happier. Plugging in immediately reveals that Fender's new Player Series alnico II humbuckers were worth the months of R&D – there's no shortage of high-end harmonics from the Jazzmaster's pair of double creams and the fuss-free electronics stay out of the way and allow you to get lost in the business of actually playing the thing.

We'd have no complaints if the simple three-way switch, master volume and tone constituted the full extent of onboard tone-shaping but pull up the tone control (admittedly not always the easiest thing to do at the first attempt with a Strat-style skirted knob) and the lower-output, hollow coil-split tones are just the ticket for lighter, more ethereal textures. Fear not though – even in full humbucking mode there's no doubt that you're playing a Fender. It's loads of fun when fed into tweedy overdriven amp, and (along with a suitable adjustment of playing style) you can flip between Neil Young down at the bridge and fat Jimi-style tones up at the neck with a flick of the pickup selector switch. Very cool indeed.

Rather than Mustang or vintage-style threaded units, the Jazzmaster bridge features fully adjustable barrel-type saddles that are notched properly to avoid strings jumping off saddles when you attack the guitar with an aggressive right hand. However, the unwound strings' saddles can slide laterally when used with the supplied 0.009 to 0.042 gauge strings – a heavier set would almost certainly have the tension necessary to keep this in check but as ever, the offset modders' union recommends going the whole hog and dropping a Mastery bridge in there.

In a job in which we're lucky enough to be exposed to the best that the guitar industry has to offer on a weekly basis, it's rare that a £599 electric comes through the door and ends up being so damn hard to put down. It's not perfect – the vibrato arm has a little unwanted play on our review example, although that doesn't hinder its ability to create some gorgeous textures – but for its sheer play me/buy me vibe and tones that punch well above their weight, the Jazzmaster is the star here.

The Player Telecaster is no slouch either. Its vocal and expressive neck pickup instantly impresses, and the other two pickup selector positions elicit the same response. It's clear but not brittle and delivers a range of classic Telecaster tones with pleasing jangle, snap and snarl, whether your tastes lean towards Bakersfield or Dartford. Brass saddles will always be a key part of the quintessential Telecaster tone for some – and it's worth remembering that Keef's trusty Micawber has five of 'em! – but nevertheless this is an eminently likeable, not to mention modifiable, Telecaster that takes care of business on a blue-collar budget.

THE NEW PICKUPS OFFER A MORE EXPRESSIVE AND SOPHISTICATED RANGE OF VOICES THAN THEIR MEXICAN STANDARD FOREBEARS

Following three stellar performers, the Player Stratocaster isn't quite as easy to get excited about – our review example is a bit of a heavyweight and its two-point vibrato feels rather elastic and unsubtle compared to the beautiful shimmers offered by the Jazzmaster's unit. However, like all of its stablemates, the Strat's new pickups really do help it offer a more expressive and sophisticated range of voices than its Mexican Standard forebears.

There's more going on in the upper-harmonics than you'd typically hear at this price point. Meanwhile, the dedicated bridge tone control is handy for taming the highs and offering faux humbucker tones with an overdriven amp or stompbox in the chain. Clean tones are nasal, quacky and vocal – unmistakably the real deal but in the Knopfler and Rodgers camp rather than SRV or Jimi. That said, break those 'board edges, round off the fret ends, pop a couple of extra springs on the vibrato and throw on a set of 0.011s and we're having a different conversation.

Okay so these guitars are a little more expensive than their predecessors and we still wish Fender's entry-level guitars came with gigbags but – and it's a big but, we cannot lie – your post-Brexit tank of petrol isn't as cheap as it used to be, neither is your weekly food shop and neither is your next guitar. Here in mid-2018 the Fender Player series represents excellent value for money and the instruments are tangible improvements over the previous Mexican Standard models. Expect to see and hear a lot more of these guitars...

KEY FEATURES

Fender Player Stratocaster

- **PRICE** £559
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in Mexico
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple modern C neck with pau ferro 9.5" radius fingerboard, 22 medium jumbo frets and synthetic bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Standard cast/sealed tuners, two-point Synchronized vibrato bridge with bent steel saddles, 3-ply parchment pickguard
- **ELECTRICS** 3x Player Series Alnico V Strat single-coil pickups, 5-position blade pickup selector switch, master volume, neck/middle tone, bridge tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 51.8mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.1mm at first fret, 22.3mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 51.7mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 8.5lbs/3.8kg
- **FINISH** Sonic Red gloss polyester, satin urethane on back of neck with gloss urethane headstock face. Also available in Polar White, 3-Colour Sunburst, Black, Tidepool (maple 'board only), Buttercream (maple 'board only), Sage Green Metallic (pau ferro 'board only)
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Expressive and very vocal-sounding pickups
+ Dedicated bridge tone control
– Frets and fingerboard edges are a bit on the sharp side

Not the star of the show here, but there's still much to love for Strat fans, including the tempting price tag

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Fender Player Telecaster

- **PRICE** £549
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody single-cutaway electric guitar. Made in Mexico
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple modern C neck with maple 9.5" radius fingerboard, 22 medium jumbo frets and synthetic bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Standard cast/sealed tuners, six-saddle string-through-body Telecaster bridge with bent steel saddles, 3-ply black pickguard
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Player Series Alnico V Tele single-coil pickups, 3-position blade selector switch, master volume, master tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.6mm at nut, 51.4mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.4mm at first fret, 22.4mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.4mm at nut, 53.7mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.9lbs/3.6kg
- **FINISH** Butterscotch Blonde gloss polyester, satin urethane on back of neck with gloss urethane headstock face and fretboard. Also available in Three-Colour Sunburst, Polar White, Black (maple 'board only), Tidepool (maple 'board only), Sonic Red (pau ferro 'board only)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Dependable, fuss-free performance and sounds
+ Softer 'board edges make for a friendly feel
– A fatter neck would suit the blue-collar aesthetic

It's hard to argue with such a well-sorted and affordable take on Leo's firstborn

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Fender Player Jazzmaster

- **PRICE** £599
- **DESCRIPTION** Offset solidbody double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in Mexico
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple modern C neck with pau ferro 9.5" radius fingerboard, 22 medium jumbo frets and synthetic bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Standard cast/sealed tuners, six-saddle bridge with floating vibrato tailpiece, 3-ply black pickguard
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Player Series alnico II humbucking pickups, three-position toggle switch, master volume, master tone (pull for coil split)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.9mm at nut, 51.3mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.3mm at first fret, 22.4mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.2mm at nut, 54.7mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 8.4lbs/3.8kg
- **FINISH** Sage Green Metallic gloss polyester, satin urethane on back of neck with gloss urethane headstock face. Also available in Polar White, Buttercream, Three-Colour Sunburst (all pao ferro 'boards only)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Impressive and versatile humbucker tones
+ Looks absolutely fantastic in this finish
– Plain-string saddles can wander when light gauges are used

The coolest-looking Player series guitar is also the most inspiring. We want one!

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Fender Player Precision Bass

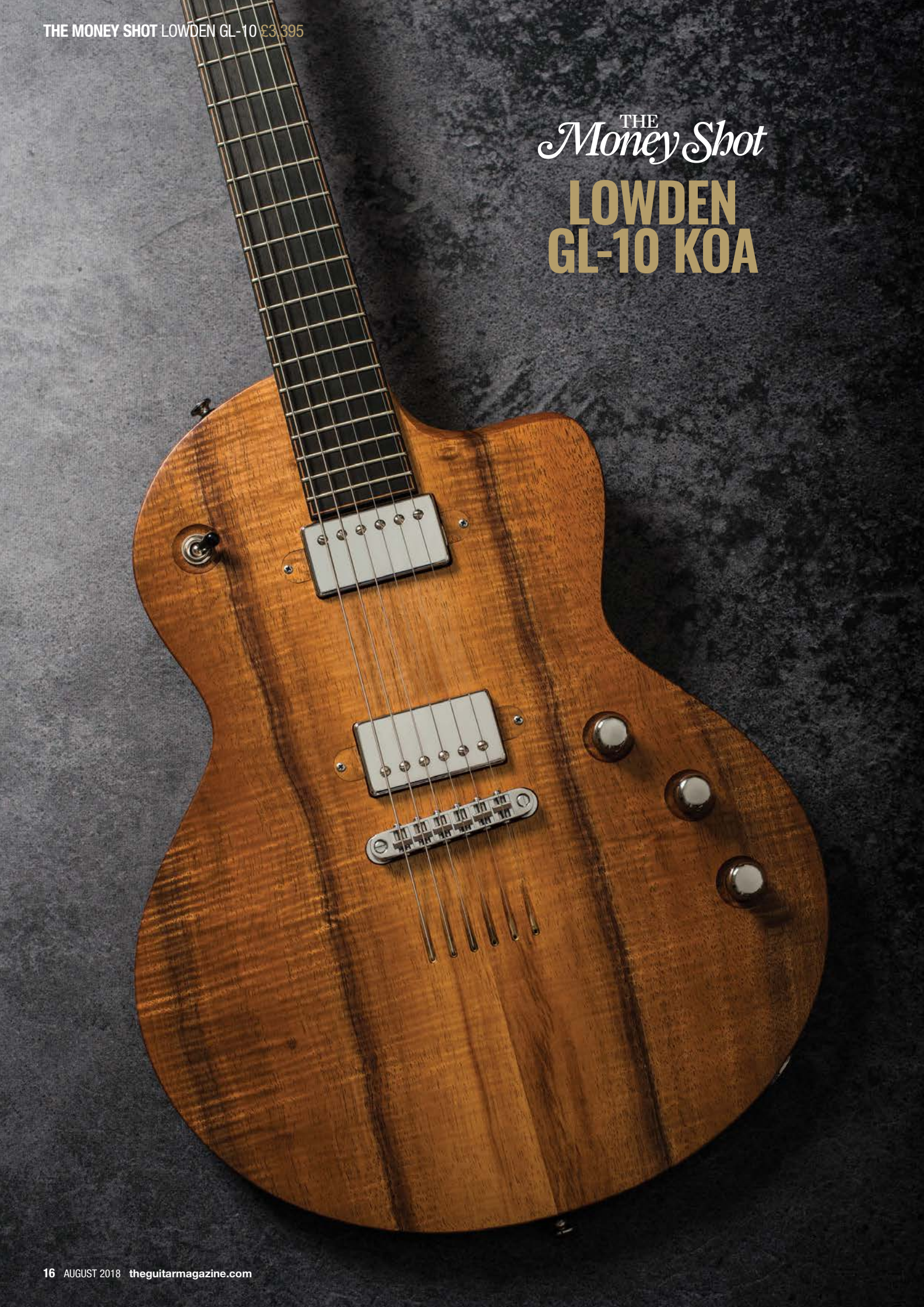
- **PRICE** £659
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody double-cutaway electric 4-string bass. Made in Mexico
- **BUILD** Alder body, bolt-on maple modern C neck with pau ferro 9.5" radius fingerboard, 20 medium jumbo frets and synthetic bone nut
- **HARDWARE** 4-saddle Standard bridge, open-gear tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Player Series Alnico V split single-coil Precision Bass pickup
- **SCALE LENGTH** 34"/864mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 41.3mm at nut, 57.6mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.0mm at first fret, 22.7mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 32.5mm at nut, 58.1mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 9.1lbs/4.1kg
- **FINISH** Black gloss polyester, satin urethane on back of neck with gloss urethane headstock face. Also available in Three-Colour Sunburst, Tidepool (maple 'board only), Buttercream (maple 'board only), Polar White, Sage Green Metallic (pao ferro 'board only), Sonic Red (pao ferro 'board only)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Newbies to bass will appreciate the smaller neck dimensions
+ Classic P-Bass tones with added edge
– G-string saddle can slide around with supplied strings

A simple, easy-playing workhorse that's way more versatile than it looks

8/10



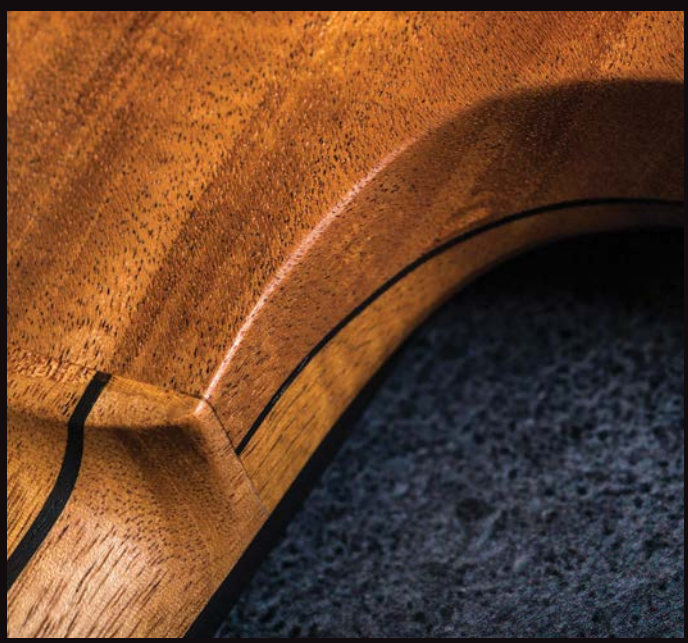
THE *Money Shot*

LOWDEN GL-10 KOA

Four decades since he first built an electric guitar, a request from an artist saw George Lowden's interest in solidbody six-strings revived. After heading off on a retreat to consider design options, George began the prototyping phase and immediately struck gold. "The first prototype exceeded my expectations in terms of visual appeal, balance and, in the guitar's inherent design features, a natural ability to sustain without trying!" claims George. He's not wrong.

We first encountered the GL-10 at Winter NAMM in January and it was one of those rare, show-stopping moments during which the noise and the crowds melt away as you experience the sheer joy of spending time with a beautifully crafted instrument that's as impressive to play as it is to admire from afar. It's hard to imagine a more elegant fusion of virtuoso acoustic guitar luthiery and modern electric guitar design – the GL-10's lines and attention to detail bring something new to the table while remaining every inch a Lowden.

We'll have a full review in next month's mag but in the meantime, feast your eyes on the gorgeous figured koa top that adorns this particular instrument, currently available to purchase from Coda Music in Stevenage (coda-music.com). Visit lowdenguitars.com for more information.



The Guitar Magazine COMPETITION WORTH £154!

WIN! Audio-Technica ATH-M50xBB headphones

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Whether you're listening back to your latest home recording project, practising at home in blissful isolation, or relaxing with your favourite tunes, a great set of cans is an essential part of any musician's arsenal. To make sure that you're enjoying your music in all its forms, we're giving one lucky *The Guitar Magazine* reader the chance to win some pro-quality Audio-Technica ATH-M50xBB headphones in a limited edition metallic blue finish.

Audio-Technica has more than 50 years of experience in the high-end audio game, and as such the firm's cans are relied upon by professional recording studios and star musicians the world over – including the likes of Metallica, James Bay, Royal Blood and many more.

The ATH-M50xBB professional monitor headphones were released at Winter NAMM 2018, as a limited edition version of the popular ATH-M50x in this striking metallic blue-finish.

As eye-catching as they are, however, the most important thing about the headphones is what's going on inside, and there Audio-Technica has also got you covered. From the 45mm large-aperture drivers with rare earth magnets and copper-clad aluminium wire voice coil, to its sound-isolating earcups, the ATH-M50xBB set provides an unmatched audio experience for recording, live sound, practice and personal listening.

The headphones also incorporate technology drawn from Audio-Technica's long history in the field of pro audio, providing exceptional power handling, very high SPL capability, and natural, accurate sound with impactful bass and high-frequency extension. With their professional-grade earpad and headband material, and a collapsible design with detachable cable, the ATH-M50xBBs are also supremely comfortable and easy to transport. To find out more about Audio-Technica's M-series headphones visit audio-technica.com, and to be in with a chance of winning a set for yourself, simply visit the link below and answer the following question:

theguitarmagazine.com/comps/atphones

Q What year was Audio-Technica first established in Japan?
A 1926 **B** 1862 **C** 1962

Closing 12.00am GMT, 20 August 2018

THE '70s JAZZ BASS. AMERICAN ORIGINAL SERIES.

CLASSIC DESIGN MADE NEW.

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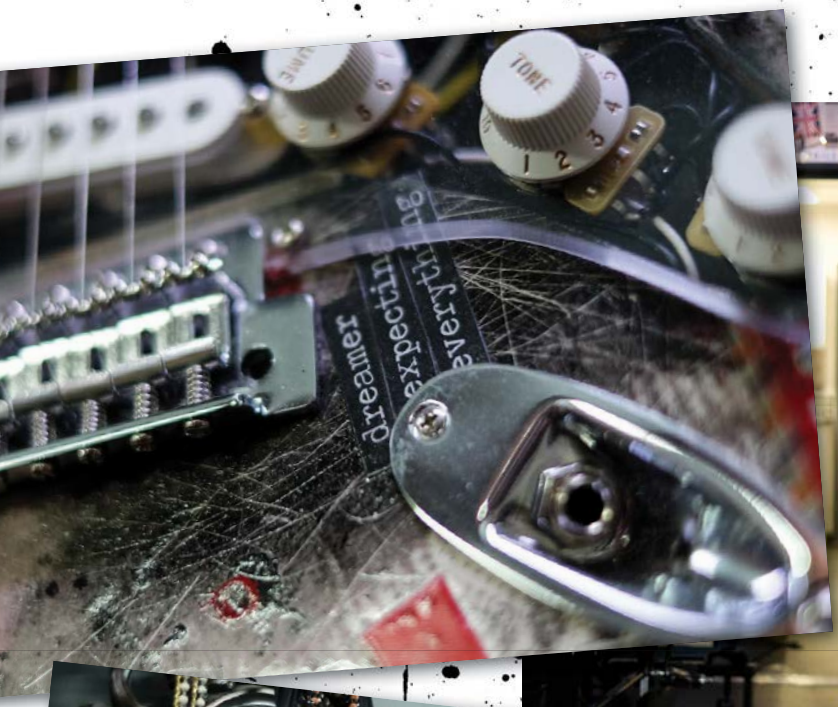
TONE
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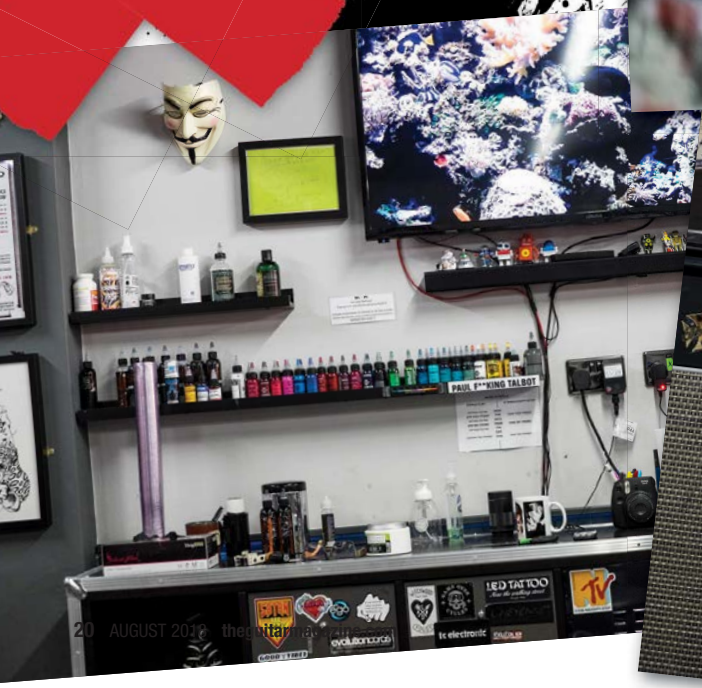
PAUL F**KING TALBOT
LED TATTOO

GIRLS

Marshall

This one-off Fender Strat customised by Paul could be yours by answering the question below

TATTOO YOU

Paul Talbot is often cited as one of the world's leading exponents of a graphic tattoo style that inspired a whole scene. He also loves guitars...

Tattoos and rock 'n' roll go together like apple pie and ice cream, and this is especially true for tattoo artist Paul Talbot. Based in a studio about 10 miles south west of Birmingham in the Worcestershire village of Catshill, Talbot describes his style as "karma punk collages on human skin," and he agrees enthusiastically when we remark that his work looks like pop art dragged through a dirty rehearsal room.

After a four-day stint in an art college that he hated, the affable Talbot found himself in a band with a record deal, but the need to pay the bills resulted in a job as a gardener in a recording studio. "I was the worst gardener in the world 'cause I suffered from hayfever, but I was good at making tea and curling up mic leads," he laughs when explaining his first steps into a career that saw him making radio jingles and working his way up the ladder to full-blown record production.

All the while his band Yeah God! continued, but touring with Pop Will Eat Itself and encountering The Designers Republic was the inspiration that eventually led to a career in graphic design. "The tattooing thing was always present but never really came to the fore because I never saw anything that really spoke to me at all, other than the hooligan aspect," he recalls.

That all changed when he encountered a piece in a magazine on a small scene of avant-garde, graphic tattoo artists. "They were mostly hated by the world of tattooing, which instantly told me it was something good," he remembers. Finding a style that resonated with the iconography of his musical influences and experiences was the catalyst for Paul to set up his own tattoo studio, and he's never looked back...

Visit www.paultlbt.com to find out more

WIN! A STANDARD STRAT WITH CUSTOM PAUL TALBOT ARTWORK

It's no exaggeration to call this competition prize a one-off. Paul approached the custom paint job exactly as he would a tattoo. "I was a much better mix engineer than I ever was a player," he says. "That's kind of like collage in music, making something new from disparate elements. This isn't the Sistine Chapel, it's brutalist and it wants to be a little bit destructive and aggressive."

Visit the following website and answer the question to enter: theguitarmagazine.com/comps/tattoo

Q Which of these is the title of a Rolling Stones album?
A Tattoo You **B** Tattooed Lady **C** Head Tattoo

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PRIVATE COLLECTION

PLAYER'S GRADE

Owning a vintage Gibson – let alone a collection of them – may seem like an impossibility. Yet Rob Sampson disagrees, because he's actually done it. Huw Price finds out more...

Rob Sampson's collection is as impressive as they come – but refreshingly, his approach is quite different from that of most collectors. He's unafraid of refinishes, headstock breaks, missing parts and modifications. By and large, he avoids top dollar items, instead focusing on less-coveted models and picking up 50s and 60s guitars for less than the cost of current production reissues. But why did he choose to focus on Gibson?

"The beauty of the Gibson brand, from a collecting point of view, is that there are far more midrange models that are affordable," he explains. "With Fenders, there are fewer models, and Strats and Teles from the 50s and 60s are an awful lot of money. I realised I'd never own a 50s Les Paul Standard, so I got into ES-330s instead. I went through several of those until I got a '62 ES-335. It was a refin with a headstock break, but it was ridiculously cool, and I got an early-60s ES-335 for £2,000! Later, I got a '66 ES-345 that was

PRIVATE COLLECTION

also cheap, because the 'board had been replaced. As a result, I slowly realised that player-grade stuff with repairs and some changes can be relatively affordable. If there are hardware issues, you can just find replacements online and put things back to original."

Chasing down vintage parts and guitar-related ephemera has added to Rob's enjoyment, so how does he do it? "Basically, I just scour the internet", he admits. "Etsy has lots of interesting stuff on it, which you would never think; eBay of course, but I haven't figured out yet whether Reverb is a really good or bad thing for me! My Reverb Watch List is ridiculous: tuners, pickups, hardware and even stuff like original keys for Lifton cases."

> "I REALISED THAT PLAYER-GRADE STUFF WITH REPAIRS AND SOME CHANGES CAN BE RELATIVELY AFFORDABLE"

Rob's love of rock music began when a schoolmate brought a cassette tape of *Appetite For Destruction* to class. Pictures of Slash and various other rockstars of the era often featured Les Pauls and, when Rob decided to learn guitar, that's the model he wanted to play. A succession of copies followed, before Rob started buying vintage Japanese guitars because they were that bit closer to the vintage Les Pauls he saw in guitar books. But his tastes were broadening, too. "I went to art school in Lancaster and there was a shop called Hobbs Music," he recalls. "The guy had modern Gibsons, but in the back of the shop, there were a load of jazz guitars up on the wall. There were L-5s, L-7s, really top-of-the-line stuff, and none of them were for sale. Even though I don't play jazz, I fell in love with those because they are so beautiful and the craftsmanship is incredible."

Rob's first vintage Gibson was acquired soon he graduated and moved to London. "I'd saved up about £1,500, so I managed to pay six weeks' rent in advance. My dad drove me down on the Sunday, and on the Monday, I went to Denmark Street and spent £500 on a '62 Melody Maker. It had been Grovered, so it was £150

Opposite **Rob's 1949 ES-300N features an outrageously flamey maple top**

Above **Rob's 1953 Fender Bassman. The 'PM' on the 15-inch Jensen speaker stands for 'permanent magnet'**

Above **Rob's 1936 Gibson L-Century 'Century Of Progress' is one of only 33 made. Rob mainly uses this striking mother-of-pearl-heavy acoustic for slide**

cheaper, but I had no job and I'd just blown half of my remaining money. I still do that sort of thing. If there's a guitar that I can't let get away, but I haven't really got the money, I'll buy it anyway and then figure something out."

GUARDIAN ANGEL

The Melody Maker is long gone, but Rob managed to replace it with some fantastic solidbody Gibsons, including a TV Model. "I've had it for about four years. It came from Angel Music. Somebody in the past moved one of the studs, presumably to improve intonation, and it has a DMC repro tailpiece. It's had a headstock break, too, and the new frets are too big, so I might get it refretted." We ask if the 'board will get refurbished in the process, but Rob has strong views about that. "I'm quite particular about fingerboards, because I think that's where a lot of the feeling and soul of a vintage guitar comes from. That played-in waxiness you get from Brazilian rosewood."

> "THE FINGERBOARD IS WHERE A LOT OF THE FEELING AND SOUL OF A VINTAGE GUITAR COMES FROM"

Despite putting his 1950s Les Paul dream on hold, Rob stumbled upon a Les Paul Custom. "I've known Steve from Lucky Fret Music for a while, so I popped in for a chat and saw it downstairs," Rob recalls.

"You can't miss a chance to play a 1950s Les Paul, so Steve took it off the wall, plugged it into a Tweed Deluxe and after playing one chord, I said: 'I don't care what it takes, I've got to have this'. I ended up trading a few guitars for it, but hey, I have a real 1950s Les Paul and I never thought I'd own one. I'm not entirely sure of the year, because the back of the neck was refinished, but I think it's a '55 or '56."

The Les Paul Custom's original staple and P-90 pickups had been changed to a short-spaced, long-magnet PAF in the neck position and a PAF-spec Patent Number humbucker in the bridge. The pots and Bumblebee caps have never been changed, and it's an all-mahogany body with the drilled wire channel

EASTMAN

Antique Goldburst Varnish

SB59/v SOLID BODY. VINTAGE SOUL.

eastmanguitars.com

Opposite **This TV model has a well repaired headstock break, a DMC repro bridge and an added post holes, but when it looks and sounds this good, who cares?**

Top **Rob's 1959 ES-225, complete with an original Cali Girl case and candy**

Bottom left **This natural-finish '58 ES-225 is still relatively affordable, but they're becoming more sought after**

Bottom middle **Rob's '64 ES-330 has been refinished, but all of its parts are otherwise original**

Bottom right **Rob's 1980s dot-neck 335 has been modded with vintage parts and pickups to make it look and sound like the real thing**

straight from the output jack socket to the switch. The neck sounds really woody and flutey and beautiful, and then the bridge pickup is really spiky and Tele-like. Think of the *Sympathy For The Devil* solo and it does that. It's a phenomenal guitar. You can play anything on vintage Les Pauls, but you can't on modern ones."

Having gone through a variety of Les Pauls, ES and jazz models, Rob became stricken with "a bad case of flattop sickness" and quickly acquired six vintage acoustics. The highlight is probably a 1930 Gibson L-2 in Argentine Grey with gold-sparkle binding.

"It was second-in-line to the Nick Lucas model," Rob says. "Nobody knows how many they made, but probably about 200, so it's really rare and unique in terms of its finish.

"It had been on the wall in No.Tom Vintage & Classic Guitars in Denmark Street for quite a while. I'd noticed it and knew what it was, but I didn't know much about it. I always like to research something before I buy it and delving in, I discovered the regard this model is held in.

> "I PLAYED ONE CHORD ON THE CUSTOM AND SAID: I DON'T CARE WHAT IT TAKES, I'VE GOT TO HAVE THIS"

"It was one of the most expensive guitars Gibson made during the Great Depression, and it's probably the most Martin-sounding, because it doesn't have that 'dry' sound. It's a lot more articulate than that and it even has a Martin look, with 12 frets and the bridge sitting lower on the body. My '46 L-00 was on Denmark Street labelled as a '49, but it had the script logo, which they only did from 1946 to mid-1947. So it was priced lower than it should have been. I'm into the history of these things, and this would have

PRIVATE COLLECTION

been one of the first guitars built by the Gibson guys when they got back from the war. That feels special to me.

"All my acoustics have mahogany backs and sides except my 1936 Gibson L-Century 'Century Of Progress', which has flamed maple. That thing's a cannon, it's incredibly loud. It started out as the Hawaiian Model with a whopping V neck and the action is fairly chunky. I bought it with the tall nut for slide playing and I didn't want to convert it fully for regular playing. It's a bit odd, because it has the pearloid fretboard, but it's Brazilian rosewood underneath. I find the character so compelling and although it's indulgent, I bought it for playing slide. Although I'm no expert, I like to use guitars for what their original intention was and be as rounded as possible in terms of what I play. I keep it in open D and sometimes take it up to open E, but those old Grover tuners don't really like going above standard tuning."

ACCEPTABLE IN THE 80S

Despite his love of vintage Gibsons, Rob is a man after our own hearts when it comes to reissues. "A lot of people who follow me on Instagram assume my blonde ES-335 is vintage, but it's an 80s one," he admits. "Owning a vintage blonde dot neck is an impossibility for most of us, so I wondered how close could I get. Vintage parts and pickups do make a massive difference, so I installed Patent Number pickups, real M69 rings and an ABR-1 bridge. The Bigsby and 'Custom Made' plaque are 1960s and the knobs, pickguard and switch tip are vintage, too.

"It's the same story with my Les Paul Standard and, to an extent, both guitars are just borrowing these parts. If I find a vintage husk that's missing parts, everything can be transferred across. I see it as having two full sets of parts ready for a Les Paul conversion, or a stripped ES-335 if something comes up. That's another great thing about Gibsons. The parts tended to span most of those models. With Fenders, you can't put a Strat pickup into a Tele or vice versa. A Dog Ear P-90 is a Dog Ear P-90 and you can put one in an ES-300 or a Junior and all models in between. There's something inherently different about the old ones, and while I don't buy into the 'vintage is always best' thing, I think that it's true of all the Les Paul models. If I had six grand to spend, I'd rather a beaten-up old Special than a modern True Historic Standard.

"For the price of some Collector's Choice Les Pauls, you could get a vintage ES-330 and a 50s ES-225, and still have change. I don't think people realise that it doesn't matter if a guitar has had a headstock break, so long as it has been repaired well. Even if the guitar has been refinished, you still have Brazilian rosewood, Honduras mahogany and original parts and pickups, and they do sound different."

Before we leave, Rob imparts some more sage advice. "People think that collecting vintage guitars is a rich-man's game, and to an extent that's true. But there were so many midrange Gibson models, you can buy cheaper guitars that are every bit as good as the really valuable ones. The only way I can buy a lot of this stuff is by getting player's-grade guitars. If I'd bought all these things in original condition, the collection would have cost me three times what I've actually spent. Sometimes, the value of a guitar with replaced vintage parts exceeds what I spent on it, but even if the increase in value just means I'll just get my investment back, it makes the guitar far easier to sell.

"In the meantime, the guitars will get used because I play them at home and I'm happy to lend them out to friends for recording. That's really important to me. They're always good-to-go, in tune with fresh strings and they are all played regularly."

This page **Rob with his pride and joy, a '56 Les Paul Custom modded with humbuckers**

Opposite top right **Rob has heavily restored his 1934 Gibson L-00, including crack repairs and finish touch-ups**

Opposite bottom left **A banner headstock Gibson LG2 from 1946 cosies up with a 1930 Gibson L2 in Argentine Grey**

Opposite bottom right **This Gibson EH125 lap steel features a P13 pickup, which was the forerunner of the P-90**

Steve Carr working on an amp chasis at Carr's facility in Pittsboro, about 15 miles from Chapel Hill

Letters from *America*

STEVE CARR

In a new direction for his Stateside column, Dave Hunter heads out to meet some of America's finest luthiers and amp-builders. For this first instalment, he sits down with the affable Steve Carr, the mind behind Carr Amplifiers…

Photos Tom Coffey Photography

In a field crowded with boutique makers, many of whom are mainly reformulating classic amp designs in fancy packages, Carr Amplifiers of Pittsboro, North Carolina, has stood out as a true original for 20 years. Not only have none of Carr's amps directly replicated any existing design, but each has resolutely followed founder Steve Carr's diktat, insisting upon premium design, construction and components. None of the above comes as a surprise, given Carr's training in aerospace engineering. Yet we can rest assured that he has dosed his designs with the guitarists' propensity toward harmonic distortion rather than mere precision and sterility, with the aim of creating some of the most enduring models in the world of hand-built tube amps.

BURSTING INTO FLAMES

For Carr, a love for both music and electronics has always gone hand in hand, and it began early. "When I was 10 years old or so, we lived in northern Indiana, not far from Chicago," he tells us, "And if the atmosphere was right, you could get Chicago radio stations, and I used to try to hear the *Dr Demento* show on my nine-volt transistor radio. One of my earliest experiments was when I thought, 'Shoot, if I plugged the wall into the radio's nine-volt connector, I could really pull in the stations!' So I cut a cord and twisted it around and plugged it in – and it burst into flames. So that was my first experience with electronics [laughs]. But the idea was good, and I think those kinds of ideas have carried forward."

Attending Purdue University in Indiana in the 80s, Carr played the bass in several campus bands before switching to guitar – "Purdue was the only place I've ever heard of where there were tons of bass players and drummers, but no guitar players," he relates – but even more than the playing, it was the gear-chasing that got him hooked on tube amps and what they could do. A move to the East Coast after university eventually landed him in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and while he continued to play in bands, working the thriving local music scene, he also became more and more fascinated by what was going on inside the amplifiers he was using.

"One of the things that really brought me along was meeting a repair guy named Rich

Bogart around 1995," Carr tells us. "He did it as a side job. He worked at IBM repairing mainframe computers, and he was on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, but often he'd have three weeks with nothing to do. So he started this tube-amp repair place, and I would just hang out there and talk to him.

"I finally said: 'Hey, can I get a job here?' and he said: 'You should do what I did...' Which was to build a Fender Champ. Find the schematic, figure it out, get the parts, and build it. When I first got it together, it didn't work, and I was depressed, but I eventually figured out why and got it going, and after that, I sort of put a shingle out saying I could repair amps, even though I had almost no experience. But in Chapel Hill, there are so many musicians that I got to learn just through the kindness of all these other guys."

"GUITAR AMPS ARE REALLY THE VERY BASICS OF TUBE ELECTRONICS... BUT THERE'S SUCH A HUGE RANGE WITHIN THE SPECTRUM"

THIS IS GOOD; THIS IS NOT GOOD

Carr's transition from noob to top-tier builder came quickly, and largely through a lot of hands-in-the-circuit experience. And in the course of that, he swiftly discerned not only how to make an amp work, but how to bend tube circuits toward the sounds in his head. As he puts it: "Guitar amps are really the very basics of tube electronics, where you can make something that's safe, and which will function. But after that, there's such a huge range within the spectrum. You can change all sorts of values, and it's just a matter of flavour and taste and making decisions: 'This is good; this is not good'."

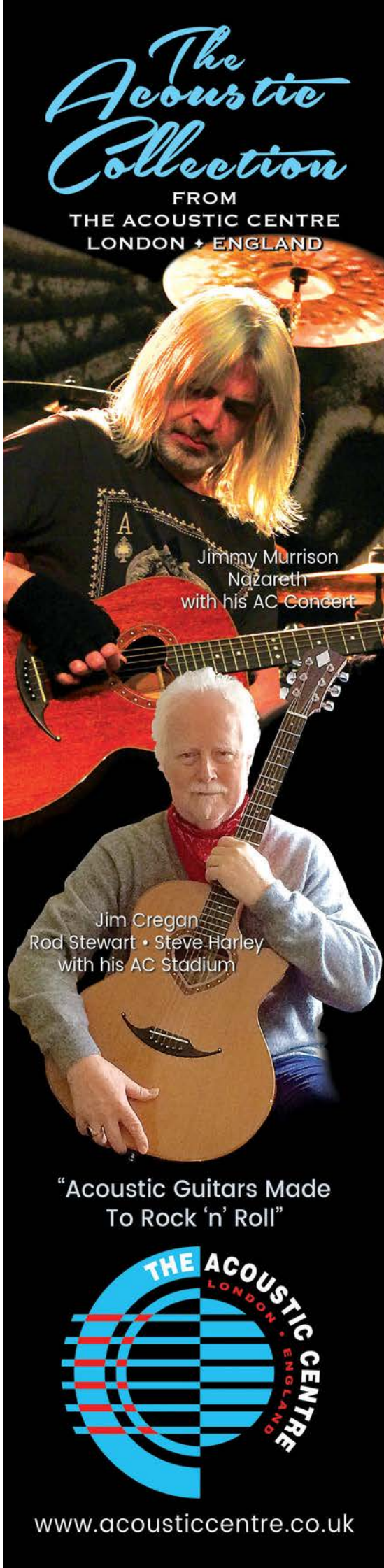
And as interest turned to obsession, it was a matter of time before Carr was diving into original designs, and sowing the seeds of a business that would rival the best of the boutique makers. "I was having so much fun messing with this stuff, and it really became an obsession – where I would go to bed thinking of these things and wake up right where I'd left off. But I had two amps that were my favourites: a 1964 Blackface Deluxe, and a 50-watt Marshall metal-panel – a non-master-volume that me and Rich Bogart had modified – two great, different sounds. Since I was playing in bands, I thought, 'What if I could combine them in one box?'. The interest was almost more for my own use, but that's how it started."

From there, Carr followed the tried and tested route of taking it down to a local music store and feeling out interest. That was November of '98, and in January, a customer walked in and purchased the first example of his debut model, the Slant 6V. "I was stunned," Carr remembers. "But that's where it starts: with a sale to another person."

QUALITY CONTROL

From the beginning, Carr's amplifiers have been known for applying the utmost

Pat, one of Carr's team of craftsmen, finishing assembly work on a Rambler model



Builder David Quick has more than a decade's worth of experience at Carr

quality to every aspect of the construction process, and the main man tells us that was a conscious decision. For example, having read about expensive Solen filter capacitors before even building his first Slant 6V, he decided he'd like to try them out, and they've been an essential part of the Carr formula ever since, alongside top-notch components throughout. "They're polypropylene," says Carr. "And they're designed for satellite use. Most amps have electrolytic filter capacitors, and they're fine, but they're not the highest-quality caps. Solens are two or three times the price of good electrolytic caps, and they're big, so they're hard to deal with, but they sound better. They're really fast at discharging, so you get really great transient speed, but they're not clinical-sounding, they're actually very warm."

Another Carr signature is point-to-point, hand wiring of the entire circuit, with no 'circuit board' at all as such; just a few terminal strips where necessary for support. This makes each build very labour-intensive and expensive, but Carr feels the pros far outweigh the cons. "The advantages are sonic, and ease of repair, because everything's right there in front of you," he explains. "But it's also kind of a fun, artisanal way to build something. We really enjoy the hand-tool work and the pride of achievement when you've completed one of these, rather than just slapping in a circuit board – which isn't 'bad', but it's just not what we want to do."

POPULARITY CONTEST

The most popular model in the company's more than two decades of history has been the Rambler combo – "I thought if I could make 10 amps, that would be it, I'd retire," Carr recalls. "To date, we've sold 2,300 Ramblers!" – while the smaller Mercury combo, recently reconceived as the Mercury V, has proven another perennial. Not every model has flown, though, and Carr as a company has likely removed more great amps from the catalogue over the years than many other boutique makers have ever introduced. Such is the 'suck it and see' nature of the business, he tells us.

"We love every model we came up with. We believed it was great, and still believe that," Steve insists. "But we exist by selling amps, and if that one wasn't popular, we have to move on. We have to sell to survive." Which isn't to say it's entirely the end of the line for those efforts: "A lot of the deleted models end up in the hands of people who love them – this little community that loves the Hammerhead, or the Artemis, or the Bloke, or the Imperial. So that's a great thing. And they also seem to really retain their resale value."

The next model that Carr hopes will fly is a simple yet unusual design currently called the Telstar, likely available in autumn 2018. Built into a TV-front cabinet, the amp combines a tweed-flavoured preamp and tone stack with reverb and an unusual output stage that combines one EL84 with an octal tube (your choice of 6V6, 6L6, or EL34) in a push-pull configuration that generates 16 watts, with a built-in attenuator to dial it down to zero.

Of the ever-creative thinking involved in the Telstar's design, Carr says: "I originally had two EL84s in it, and I just wanted a little more firmness in the low end, but still that EL84 does such a great job of transitioning from clean to overdrive, so I wanted to keep that. So I worked it out with one 6V6, and found that with a little more tweaking, you could use any octal, and it just kind of changes the flavour a little bit. This amp has a very haunting clean sound that, once again, is tweed-like, but it's almost a finer-crunched tweed overdrive."

It's common for brands to do something big to celebrate a milestone, but for the firm's 20th anniversary, Steve opted to try something different. Carr's Pittsboro facility is now 'off the grid', so all its amps and cabs are built using solar electricity – a sustainable and smart idea, from a true innovator.

To find out more about Carr Amplifiers visit www.carramps.com

Jay Manley puts a Rambler combo through its final test

IN OUR MINDS, THERE'S NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN *holding a guitar and hugging a tree.*

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1956
NG

The Custom was created by Gibson in response to Les Paul's desire for a more luxurious looking guitar

VINTAGE BENCH TEST

CUSTOM FIT

The black-lacquered, jazz club sophistication of the earliest LP Custom takes more of its styling cues from Steinway than Stromberg. Huw Price steps out with a grand '56 model...

Introduced in late 1953, the first Les Paul Custom differs from the standard Goldtop model in three ways – an all-mahogany body, a fully intonatable bridge and a 'staple' single-coil pickup in the neck position. The latter seems to have been an attempt to keep the man whose name was on the headstock on-brand – early photos of Les Paul using his signature model reveal that he'd installed a DeArmond Dynasonic in the neck position of his Goldtop, and Gibson was not pleased.

Les Paul was such a superstar, the fact that he felt the need to mod his new signature solidbody with an aftermarket pickup was obviously an embarrassment for the company, so something needed to be done. It may have rectangular rather than round polepieces, but the staple single-coil was essentially Gibson's version of the Dynasonic, with individual screws for adjusting polepiece height. The diagonal fixing screws are a throwback to the earliest Goldtops, and all the magnets are alnico V.

Complete with its original gold-lined black case, this 1956 example shows few signs of age, although the waffle-back tuners are a little vague and some of the shafts have been bent over the years. The neck carve doesn't quite have the palm-fitting comfort of some of the finest 50s Gibsons we've played, but it's still a very nice rounded profile, with very little shoulder and less depth than you might expect.

The 'staple' pickup was created after Les Paul modded his Goldtop with a DeArmond Dynasonic pickup

There are a few lacquer chips on the back of the neck and headstock edges, but the body is remarkably unscathed. Lacquer checking is minimal and besides some slightly opaque cloudiness on the front, the finish looks remarkable. The ebony fingerboard and pearl inlays are in perfect condition and there's still some height left on the skinny, flat-topped frets. The only telltale signs that this guitar has seen a lot of action are the way the neck binding has been worn into a rollover that runs evenly along both sides, and some

THE STAPLE SINGLE-COIL WAS ESSENTIALLY A GIBSON VERSION OF THE DYNASONIC

plectrum damage to the bass side binding adjacent to the neck pickup. The control cavity contains oil-filled Bumblebee capacitors and nothing has been touched since it left Kalamazoo.

IN USE

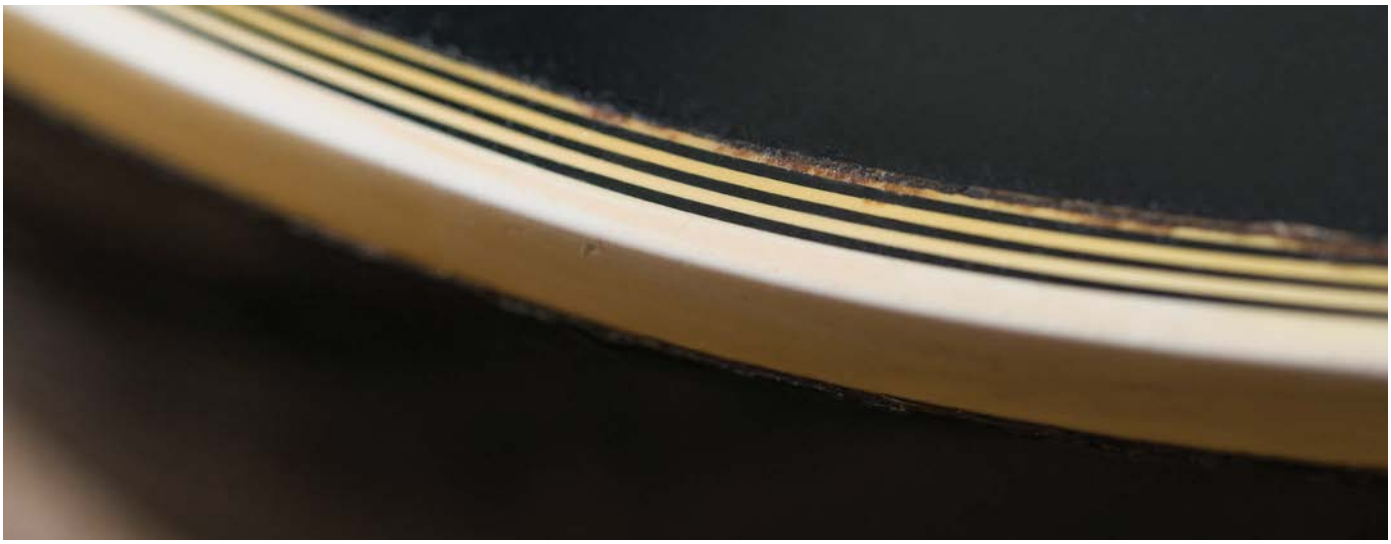
The all-mahogany body doesn't have as much effect on the acoustic resonance as you might expect. It's possibly a bit richer in harmonics than most Les Paul Standards, but nowhere near as loud or lively when unplugged as a '54 Goldtop equipped with a wrapover tailpiece. On balance, our experience seems to indicate that the ABR-1 bridge arrangement has more influence on the tone than 'tonewood' does.

Although identical in dimensions and similar in looks, the pickups on this guitar are sonically quite different.

KEY FEATURES

1956 Gibson Les Paul Custom

- **PRICE** £24,995
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Mahogany body with set mahogany neck, ebony fretboard with pearl markers, 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Kluson waffle-back tuners, Tune-o-matic bridge with stop tailpiece
- **ELECTRICS** Staple single-coil (neck), P-90 (bridge), individual pickup volume and tone controls, 3-way switch
- **FINISH** Black nitrocellulose
- **SCALE LENGTH** 625mm/24.63"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.7mm at nut, 53.05mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 24mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.75mm at nut, 51.6mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.35kg/9.57lbs
- **CONTACT** ATB Guitars www.atbguitars.com



Above top **The finish is in very good condition all over the guitar, with the most noticeable lacquer checking around the headstock logo**

Above bottom **The pinstriped body binding has yellowed in places, but is otherwise in good nick for a guitar of this age**

The commonly used term 'staple P-90' is perhaps a misnomer, because this is very much its own thing. Comparing the staple with a neck P-90 in a '54 Goldtop demonstrates that the former is a very powerful pickup. Despite being set significantly lower than the P-90, the staple matches its output and then some. But for a high-output pickup, there's no shortage of clarity and in fact, this one sounds airy and bright.

It goes deeper in the bass frequencies, too, but it never loses focus or definition. Jazz chord inversions are presented with piano-like clarity and tremendous detail. Such is the frequency range, the controls have more to work with than usual, and the variety of tones on tap may surprise you. As much as a guitar pickup could perform more like a microphone during the mid 1950s, this is probably as good as it gets – along with the DeArmond Dynasonic. And as we have already discussed, aping that design is really what the staple pickup design was all about.

SUCH IS THE FREQUENCY RANGE, THE VARIETY OF TONES ON TAP MAY SURPRISE YOU

As an audio engineer, Les Paul valued high fidelity and sonic purity above everything else, and they're certainly a big part of the staple's appeal. But it also has bags of character, with ample bass thump and a prettiness in the treble that keeps things musical and interesting. Les would later go even further in the hi-fi direction with his low-impedance pickups, but to modern ears, they sound a bit bland and sterile compared to these.

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1960 Gibson ES-345 TDSV Cherry PAF's
1962 Gibson ES-335 TD PAF PAT
1963 Gibson ES-335 TDC
1964 Gibson ES-335 TDC
1964 Gibson ES-335 TDC Vibrola
1965 Gibson ES-355 TDC Mono no Varitone
1966 Gibson ES-335 TDC
1966 Gibson ES-345 TDSVC
1967 Gibson ES-335 TD
1968 Gibson ES-335 TDC
1959 Gibson ES-175D

1964 Gibson ES-330 TDC
1967 Gibson ES-330L Burgundy
1968 Gibson ES-330 TDN Blonde

1961 Fender Stratocaster s/b
1963 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White
1965 Fender Stratocaster s/b
1969 Fender Stratocaster maple cap s/b
1970 Fender Stratocaster Blonde

1973 Fender Stratocaster LPB
1973 Fender Stratocaster Black

1956 Fender Telecaster
1956 Fender Telecaster body refin
1965 Fender Telecaster Blonde
1965 Fender Custom Telecaster Firemist Gold..!
1968 Fender Custom Telecaster Candy Apple Red
1968 Fender Custom Telecaster s/b
1968 Fender Telecaster Thinline

1959 Fender Jazzmaster Blonde
1960 Fender Jazzmaster s/b
1963 Fender Jaguar Blonde Gold
1966 Fender Jaguar Olympic White

1953 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1956 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1956 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1960 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1954 Gibson Les Paul Junior + amp
1955 Gibson Les Paul Junior
1956 Gibson Les Paul Junior TV

1958 Gibson Les Paul Junior
1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior 3/4
1962 Gibson SG Special
1964 Gibson Firebird VII
1965 Gibson SG Junior Polaris White
1973 Gibson Les Paul Deluxe Goldtop
1974 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1963 Gibson Korina Flying V White

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Above **The internal wiring hasn't been touched since the guitar left Kalamazoo, and the Bumblebee capacitors are all original**

Right **The Kluson tuners are one of the few aspects of the guitar that are showing signs of age, and some of the shafts have been bent over the years**

Maybe Gibson only fitted one staple unit because they were costly to manufacture, and they figured the jazz guys weren't that interested in bridge pickups anyway. It's a mismatch made in heaven for us, however, because the versatility and sonic spread of this LPC are far

THE COMBINATION OF P-90 AND STAPLE PICKUPS IS A MISMATCH MADE IN HEAVEN

greater as a result. Switch to the bridge and of course you get that great mid-50s P-90 tone. Hi-fi it's not: but if snarly and growly nasal chime does it for you, this LPC doesn't disappoint. The two pickups need some adjustment to balance out, with the P-90 set way closer to the strings, but once they're set you can switch back and forth seamlessly. Better still, these two pickups meet in the middle to create a third, very distinct, tone.

The Staple adds high- and low-frequency content to the P-90's wiry mid-focused roar – along with a greater sense of articulation and detail. There's also a pronounced midrange scoop that notching back the neck volume rapidly accentuates. Get the balance right

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Above **The ABR-1 bridge and stop tailpiece have lost a fair bit of their gold plating due to years of playing**

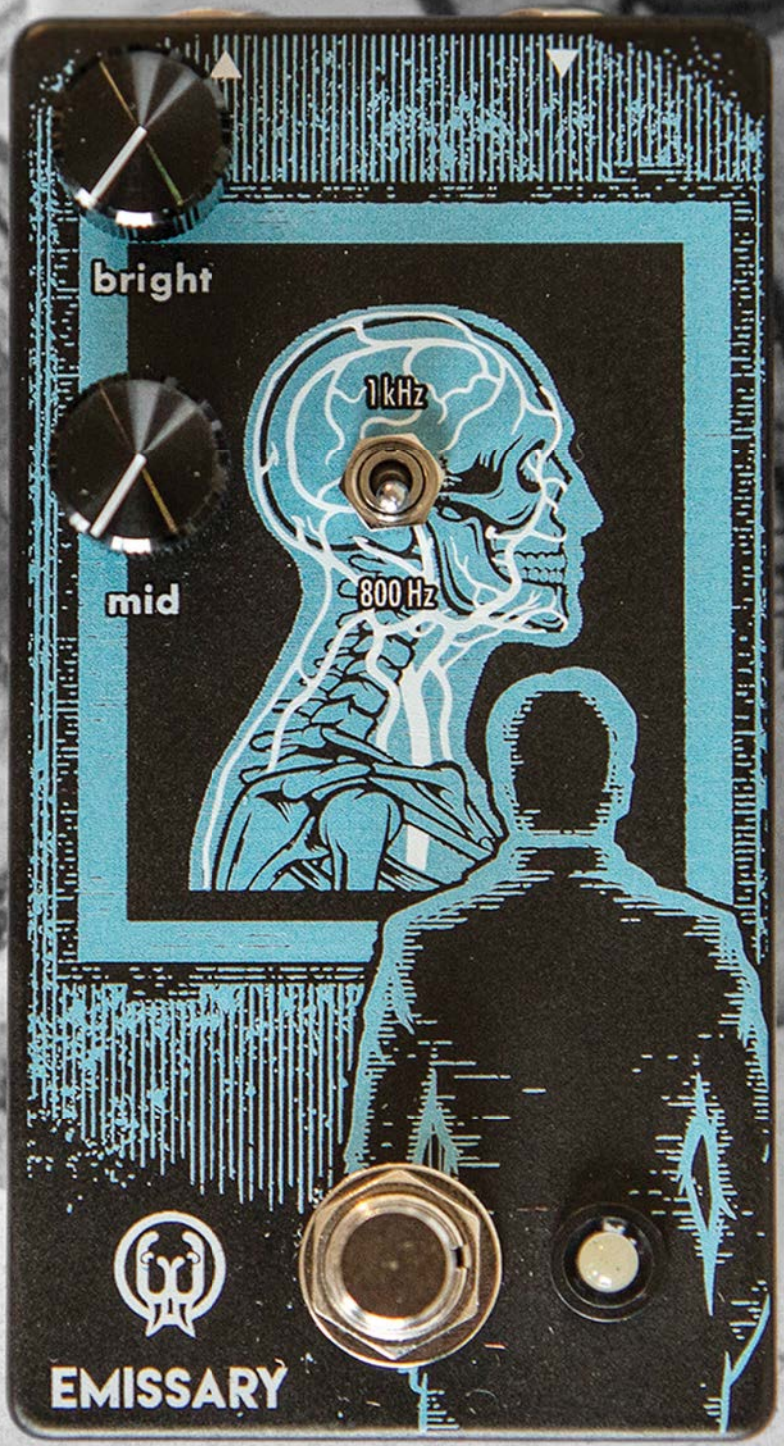
and you can veer towards a pseudo 'out of phase' tone that combines T-Bone Walker honk with a hint of Ricky jangle. Leaving the neck volume on 10 and rolling back the bridge is like applying a notch filter, with the scoop occurring lower in the frequency range. So the tone still has a phasey quality, but it's fuller, smoother and sweeter. Even by the high standards of 50s Les Pauls (no pun intended), this is an unusually versatile and sophisticated instrument.

Unlike the hooligan Goldtop, the Les Paul Custom reveals its charms gradually. This was designed to be a classier, more upmarket instrument, and by and large, it is. The Custom reputedly came about because Les requested a guitar that was like a tuxedo. While many of us might enjoy wearing a tux from time to time, the novelty value would be lost if we had to wear one every day... much like a jobbing jazz musician.

THIS IS AN UNUSUALLY VERSATILE AND SOPHISTICATED INSTRUMENT

On the whole, that analogy fits in well with how we feel about this guitar. It oozes quality and feels wonderful, but as an everyday player, our desert island choice would still be a P-90 Goldtop of a similar vintage – if we could afford one, of course. Having said that, we think this Custom might be a secret weapon in the studio, because its clarity and well-mannered dynamics would make it so easy to record, and you could dial up myriad tones that are familiar and yet just that little bit different. The tuners could do with a refurb and some might suggest a refret is in order, but we think it's fine as it is.

Overall condition is excellent and, as far as we can tell, the only non-factory items are the strings. The Staple Custom is an interesting and unfairly overlooked model in the Lester lineage, and we wonder how many examples out there are as good as this one...



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THE REVERB TOP 10

CHORUS PEDALS

It's been a studio staple since the 70s, but the chorus effect is seriously back in vogue. Dan Orkin looks at a 10-strong choir of the most popular chorus pedals on Reverb.com...

In this month's instalment of our ongoing exploration of the most popular pedals on the guitar gear market, we're taking a look at chorus. Pedal-based chorus effects date back to the mid 1970s and function (in short) by duplicating an audio signal and delaying, or otherwise modulating, the duplicate before recombining it with the source signal for the final output. The doubled signal is often modulated with an LFO, endowing the final sound with motion similar to that of a flanger or phase shifter.

Chorus is having something of a moment right now, riding a sonic wave that goes back at least three or four years. Much in the way that synthesisers have come to dominate pop-music radio, it's chorus – arguably the most '80s' of effects – that has found favour among a sweeping range of contemporary hitmakers.

However, chorus never really went away. While many might first think of Robert Smith or Andy Summers and the hits of new-wave radio, Kurt Cobain and a legion of grunge acolytes were equally enamoured with the watery sound. If you look even further back to the late 1960s, Uni-Vibe pedals – which were designed to emulate a rotating speaker cabinet but have a chorus-like sound – were used by Jimi Hendrix and plenty of other icons. Companies such as Boss (the inventor of modern chorus) have never stopped producing chorus pedals, and today's market is replete with new and used options as a result.

Seen something you need to add to your pedalboard? Head to Reverb.com and pick up one for yourself!

1 Walrus Audio Julia Chorus/Vibrato
Walrus Audio scored a major hit with the release of the Julia, a combination of chorus and vibrato effects, which was released a couple of years ago. The circuit is augmented by supremely flexible LFO controls, which vastly broaden the potential for modulation, offering a unique suite of effects beyond the standard sheen of an 80s-style, Boss-like chorus.

2 DigiTech Luxe Anti-Chorus Polyphonic Detune
The Luxe isn't exactly a chorus pedal in the traditional sense; in fact, DigiTech even goes so far as to market the device as an "anti-chorus" pedal. It functions by detuning the input signal from the guitar, in much the same way as the popular DigiTech Whammy series does. The effect, though, is unmistakably chorus-like in its tonal thickening – just with a little less modulation than you'd get from a standard circuit.

3 MXR M234 Analog Chorus
An all-analogue, bucket-brigade-based pedal, the MXR M234 Analog Chorus is a great option for anyone seeking classic, organic chorus tones. It adds a few tone-shaping tools to the package, too, like high and low filters to contour the flavour of its tone with a bit more granularity than some other analogue options on the list.

4 Boss CH-1 Super Chorus
While similar in format to other Boss-made chorus pedals, the CH-1 offers a tonal range that's a bit wider overall. This pedal has been in production since 1989 and continues to be a strong seller, despite an increasing number of companies producing new and more adventurous spins on the classic chorus template.

5 Boss CE-2W Chorus Waza Craft
Part of Boss' Waza Craft series, the Boss CE-2W is a fantastic option for anyone who wants to make a beeline for the classic chorus tones of the 80s. The CE-2W allows players to summon the circuits of the original CE-2 and CE-1 chorus pedals, and also features a vintage vibrato mode.

6 Electro-Harmonix Small Clone Full Chorus
The Small Clone is EHX's straight-ahead chorus option. Most closely associated with the guitar sound of *Nevermind*-era Kurt Cobain, the Small Clone comes in a few different-sized variants, including the pedalboard-friendly Nano Clone.

7 Danelectro Cool Cat
An extremely affordable chorus option, the Danelectro Cool Cat is a two-knob machine with few frills – but for many players, that's a good thing. While no longer in production, these pedals still sell regularly on the used market, often with a sub-£20 price tag.

8 TC Electronic Corona
Similar in format to other popular TC Electronic pedals such as the Hall Of Fame Reverb, the Corona Chorus is a supremely versatile pedal that can cover just about any chorus tone you can dream up. Like other TC pedals, it also has a nifty 'TonePrint' function that lets you beam in artist-based presets via your smartphone.

9 MXR M68 Uni-Vibe
While technically a Uni-Vibe (a similar, though distinct, effects class), the M68 from MXR is marketed as a combination chorus and as such earns its spot in these rankings. If you're interested in sounds akin to 1960s rotary speakers with a healthy dash of Hendrix-y wobble, this is the pedal for you.

10 Boss CE-5 Chorus Ensemble
A newer update to the classic CE series, the CE-5 adds a useful filter control that makes it a particularly flexible chorus pedal. It's the current scion of the genre-defining Chorus Ensemble series, and is a go-to option for anyone who loves the sound of Alex Lifeson or British new-wave guitar.

Ones TO Watch

BOY AZOOGA

Boy Azooga's Davey Newington is a man with much musical pedigree. Here he tells Sam Roberts how it all started, from orchestral upbringings to Phoebe from *Friends*...

When Davey Newington tells us of the influences that shaped his new album *1, 2, Kung Fu!* – released under the moniker Boy Azooga – he namechecks myriad artists ranging from Black Sabbath and Iggy Pop to The Beach Boys and Kelis. It's this eccentric mash-up of musicians, combined with a DIY ethos, that embodies his enthusiasm for music.

His parents met while playing in the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, and it was a gift from his Dad following a tour that got him started early with music... although not on guitar.

"My Dad came back from a tour of Japan when I was six with a Queen *Greatest Flix* VHS," he recalls. "He put it on one day and I started moving around and getting into it, so my folks got me a biscuit tin and cricket stumps. I used to try to play along for hours."

His interest in guitar playing, and indeed his first guitar, came at a later date and through an unusual influence. "It wasn't until I was about 14 that I started to take guitar more seriously," he admits. "My sister loved Phoebe from *Friends*! She got an acoustic guitar one Christmas so she could cover stuff like *Smelly Cat* and I used to mess around on that. It was a nylon-string acoustic that sort of became my first guitar. I saw Paul McCartney playing *Blackbird* and this other song called *Jenny Wren* on a documentary and I was fascinated. I spent ages in my room on that guitar practising fingerpicking."

Davey's ability was immediately evident, and he spent time playing with jazz bands and orchestras in and around Wales, including a stint on Charlotte Church's Late Night Pop Dungeon tour. Now though, he has embarked on a more personal project in Boy Azooga.

Davey's multifarious list of influences is apparent on singles, *Face Behind Her Cigarette* and *Loner Boogie*. The former, an instant funk earworm, is homage to the late Nigerian groove wizard William Onyeabor, laced with Sabbath's oft-forgotten psychedelic embellishments. "I love [Onyeabor's] songs and the sounds of his recordings, so that

song was like a celebration of his music!" he enthuses. "The chorus backing vocals are inspired by Sabbath's *Planet Caravan*, too, with that Leslie effect on the vocal." On *Loner Boogie* Davey's affection for rhythmic patterns is clear, carrying the harmonic elements of Super Furry Animals with the movement of Oh Sees or Tame Impala's *Elephant*.

GOING IT ALONE

That endless amount of musical illustration came to fruition through the help of Cardiff-based producer Eddie Al-Shakarchi. "I'd been playing drums in bands and demoing songs since I was about 15. This project didn't really come into shape until I met Eddie though." He recalls. "He's an amazing producer, mixer and all round musician. I'm a bit of a blagger on guitar but I'm lucky to have friends like him and Jack Butler from Monico Blonde who have taught me a lot. Eddie and I really clicked and when I started working with him I realised I wanted to make an album of my songs."

On *1, 2, Kung Fu!* Davey decided to play all of the instruments himself, excluding the string parts, on which he came full circle and enrolled his Dad. "I really love multi-tracking and layering stuff," says Davey of his DIY approach. "And I'm a bit of a low-key control freak! I just knew exactly how I wanted things to be played, so rather than teach someone I thought I'd give it a go myself."

While Davey's solitary recording process managed to create an album full of diverse and personal nuances, he has chosen to enrol Daf Davies, Dylan Morgan and Sam Barnes to help him out with live performances.

With album number two already in the pipeline, he's keen to add the live band to his studio work too. "I still write on my own but it's really exciting to be able to jam an idea out with the boys," he admits. "That was something missing from the first record.

"I've almost finished writing the second LP and I know there are at least five tracks that I want to do with the band. I love the sound of Neil Young's album *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere* and would love to make a live sounding record like that."

"I'M A LOW-KEY CONTROL FREAK, I JUST KNEW EXACTLY HOW I WANTED THINGS TO BE PLAYED, SO I THOUGHT I'D GIVE IT A GO MYSELF"

ROAD WORN

Boy Azooga's full live ensemble is now gearing up for a string of headline shows alongside festival appearances, including End Of The Road and Green Man. If that wasn't enough, they're all working on other projects, with Davey joining band member Sam Barnes' Shoebox Orchestra on drums, before revisiting the studio for their sophomore LP.

The debut album received rave reviews in the press, along with being named BBC Radio 6 Music's album of the day, but Boy Azooga's stock had already risen prior to this due to an appearance Jools Holland's *Later Live*. For Davey though, the hope is to simply continue on this upward trajectory. "Hopefully we can just keep making records and gigging," he affirms. "It's all I've ever wanted to do."

Before we go, we have to ask about that name... "It's named after the film *The Little Rascals*," he chuckles. "My cousin and I used to watch it when we were kids. In it they have a chant that goes 'Azooga, azooga, azooga!' and we still say it to each other. I thought it'd be good to have something personal in the name, and it's also really Google-able, nothing else comes up when you search Boy Azooga!".

***1, 2 Kung Fu!* is out now on Heavenly Records**

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DANNY KIRWAN

1950-2018

The former Fleetwood Mac guitarist sadly passed away in June at the age of 68. Little Barrie, Primal Scream and The The guitarist Barrie Cadogan reflects on the influence of a prodigious talent...

"In the early 1990s there was a BBC series called *Sounds Of The Sixties* that I used to watch with my parents and my sister. It showed that clip of Fleetwood Mac playing *Oh Well*. I was just getting into playing the guitar and my dad said, 'Oh this is Peter Green, he's incredible.' Then I noticed it wasn't him playing the guitar breaks, it was this kid with Brian Jones, Fred 'Sonic' Smith-type hair... just casually dressed with this Les Paul Goldtop.

"Obviously Peter's voice was magical but Danny struck me just as much. Peter really gave Danny the limelight in that song and I just thought wow, what an incredible sound, this guy's fantastic. Much later I met other people who were really into him as well, like Johnny Marr and J Mascis. They are big fans as well."

COMING YOUR WAY

"Danny joined and he could have just tried to sound like Peter but he didn't, that's the amazing thing. He had his own kind of timbre to his playing. No-one else had that like him. It's interesting that a lot of those guys at that time had similar equipment. Loads of them had Gibson Les Pauls but they all gave that guitar its own voice. Clapton was the catalyst, I guess, although Keith Richards had one first, then there was Peter Green, Mick Taylor, Danny Kirwan and Paul Kossoff. Then you had Bloomfield, Dickie Betts and Duane Allman on the other side.

"A lot of people talk about Duane Allman and Dickie Betts as being this ultimate guitar duo – I think those guys were fantastic but for me it was Peter and Danny. They were kind of doing it first as well. Amps were getting bigger and people were playing louder and dirtier but a lot of it was about the standard of players. It was really high then, those guys really worked at it. They didn't have the luxuries we have today of being able to watch YouTube clips of people's fingers. There were no tuition books teaching those guys how to play the blues, they just had to listen to records and try to figure it out, and maybe they found things of their own along the way.

"It's a shame that in his lifetime he didn't get the credit he deserved, which is all too often the case with some great musicians. I'm sure we all know great players who never really made records. With someone like Danny, it's weird because he was in a band that was hugely successful. Even Peter Green is underrated, he's sometimes an afterthought after some of the guitar heavyweights, which means that Danny is even less in the frame than that."

LIKE CRYING

"People know more about Clapton, Beck, Billy Gibbons and the other heavyweights. People don't talk about Paul Kossoff enough, and Danny Kirwan, no-one seemed to notice him, really. And I just couldn't believe it. I just thought, this guy was really special. That vibrato was just unbelievable. I still don't know how he was doing it. It was so lyrical, really vocal. All the best guitar players are.

"He could do it without the amps being loud as well, on songs like *Jigsaw Puzzle Blues,* where he adapted that kind of roaring 20s clarinet. There's always a fragility to the vibrato when it's mellower, it's less wired but there was that real beautiful delicacy in his playing, which was unique to him. He gave it his own voice, at a really early age. That's what blows me away."

CODAMUSIC www.coda-music.com

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The COMBINATA is available in four colour choices – Adriatic Blue Metallic, Pomodoro Red Metallic, Toro Black Metallic and Autunno Burst. The Standard model features a compensated wraptail bridge, while the Deluxe Trem model sports a Duesenberg Les Trem II with a roller saddle bridge.

The COMBINATA is the evolution of a design with which followers of Dennis Fano should be very familiar. The larger and slightly offset body give the COMBINATA a shapely silhouette and more substantial feel. The chambered mahogany body features a German carve top (mahogany on metallics, maple on burst). The 25" scale maple set-neck sports the comfortably chunky "Rivolta C+" neck profile, with 24 medium jumbo frets and a bound rosewood fingerboard.

Rivolta Guitars by Dennis Fano available at Coda Music

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: A plea from the southpaws, budget SGs and boxing clever...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

LEFT OUT IN THE COLD

Greetings *TGM*, I come to you bringing a plea from a neglected minority in the guitar world – lefties. Having played bass for many years I recently discovered that I could also play guitars with six, and indeed, 12 strings. A new world opened up to me, I started singing and the missus treated me to a year's subs to your magnificent magazine, which I always read from cover to cover.

It was in the course of this that I saw your review of the Gretsch G6118T-135 Anniversary Limited Edition, and fell in love. I have always liked the vibe of the Anniversary, and the Dark Cherry version you reviewed looked divine – and even more alluring as the band I am currently in is called The Cherrys! I read and re-read the words in your review, but my heart dropped when I moved over to the key features box and saw the terrible but inevitable words – 'left-handers: no'.

I've sadly got used to seeing that over my time subscribing, but that moment made me realise that I couldn't remember ever seeing a single trade ad in the mag mentioning any left-handed guitars either! Remembering that at least 10 per cent of the world is left-handed, I then looked back though my issues since I started subscribing in February 2017 to see how the manufacturers were treating us lefties. Of the 95 guitars reported on, this is how the figures pan out:

Yes	**11/11.6%**
Yes, with conditions (extra cost, limited colours, etc)	**12/12.6%**
No comment	**44/46.3%**
No	**28/29.5%**

It's not very scientific, but it does seem as though the guitar industry doesn't give a lot of love to left-handed guitar players, and if you search the internet for left-handed guitars (as I have done many times), you'll find that the options from even the big manufacturers are often very limited, require you to fork out more, or both.

I'm sure that the manufacturers would try to justify their reticence in this area by noting the extra costs and hassle that come with making left-handed guitars, but again, this is a substantial part of their potential market that they're ignoring! So on behalf of all left-handed guitarists out there I ask – please take heed of us, and give us the chance to buy the guitars we want!
Paul Turner, via email

TGM **Thanks for your email, Paul, we sympathise with your situation. You're right that the extra tooling involved often leads to makers passing on the costs to the consumer, offering limited colour options, or both. Of course, while 10 per cent of the world might be lefties, not all left-handed guitarists play dedicated left-handed guitars. A large number of southpaw players have chosen to play right-handed instruments upside down with no small amount of success – Jimi Hendrix being the obvious example – and then there are the lefties who simply learned to play right-handed: Mark Knopfler, Noel Gallagher, Paul Simon and *TGM*'s own Sam Roberts! Sadly this is small comfort if you've already started playing a left-handed guitar, but we hope that it helps to explain why the market is so niche. Happily, Fender's new Player series (reviewed on p8) features eight different left-handed models, and we recommend checking them out. In the meantime, enjoy your ambidextrous Overdrive strap!**

RIG RUNDOWN

Dear *TGM*, I have recently retired after more than 30 years in the offshore oil industry, (since 2011 in Brazil). The constant travelling between Rio and Trondheim meant I didn't get much chance to read my issues of the mag. However, now I have the time to go through my old copies properly – and how interesting it is! When I was looking through the September 2013 issue, I noticed your review of the Gibson SGJ – a 'budget' SG that cost just £499 – and it reminded me of another affordable SG that's very close to my heart.

I'm lucky enough to have a collection of quality guitars, but my favourite is a 1979 Gibson 'The SG', in mint condition. It has benefitted from a pro setup by Geir Falck in Trondheim, arguably Norway's premier guitar tech, and it is my go-to guitar. It's a beauty to play, and the sound is phenomenal! I was recently offered £1,350 for it, but I could not part with it, as it's such a fantastic guitar.

It made me wonder how the SGJ compares with Gibson's previous affordable models – in 50 years time, will people still be enjoying the charms of the new guitar as much as I'm enjoying mine?
Don Park, Norway

TGM **Thanks for your email, Don, glad you got around to us in the end! There's something about the simplicity of a quality 'student' guitar that can make them truly inspirational to play. While we can't say whether the SGJ will still be around in half a century, the no-frills nature of the features and build of a guitar such as that means there's very little that can go wrong, so we're sure it'll still be rocking for years to come.**

HAVE A CIGAR

Dear Chris and team, just to say I'm really enjoying reading *The Guitar Magazine* and especially the June edition. As a maker of hand-crafted stringed instruments, especially cigar box guitars, it was a treat to read the article on Ida Mae, and the super images of their old school Americana instruments.

When I started making cigar box guitars there wasn't a guitar mag in the world who would have featured them, great to see they're becoming more popular. It was doubly amazing to also see your feature on Crimson Guitars – a great school of luthiery and expertise. I have watched many of Ben Crowe's instructional videos and learnt such a lot from them.

The Guitar Magazine is my favourite guitar mag especially because of its approach to maintaining, building, repairing and out and out tinkering of instruments, amps and accessories – close ups of capacitors and the backs of amps, bring it on! I look forward with great excitement to the next issue.
Kevin Braithwaite, via email

TGM **Thanks for your kind words, Kevin. Here at *The Guitar Magazine* we're passionate about encouraging our readers to get their hands dirty and do things for themselves, especially when it comes to guitar maintenance, modification and luthiery – keep up the good work!**

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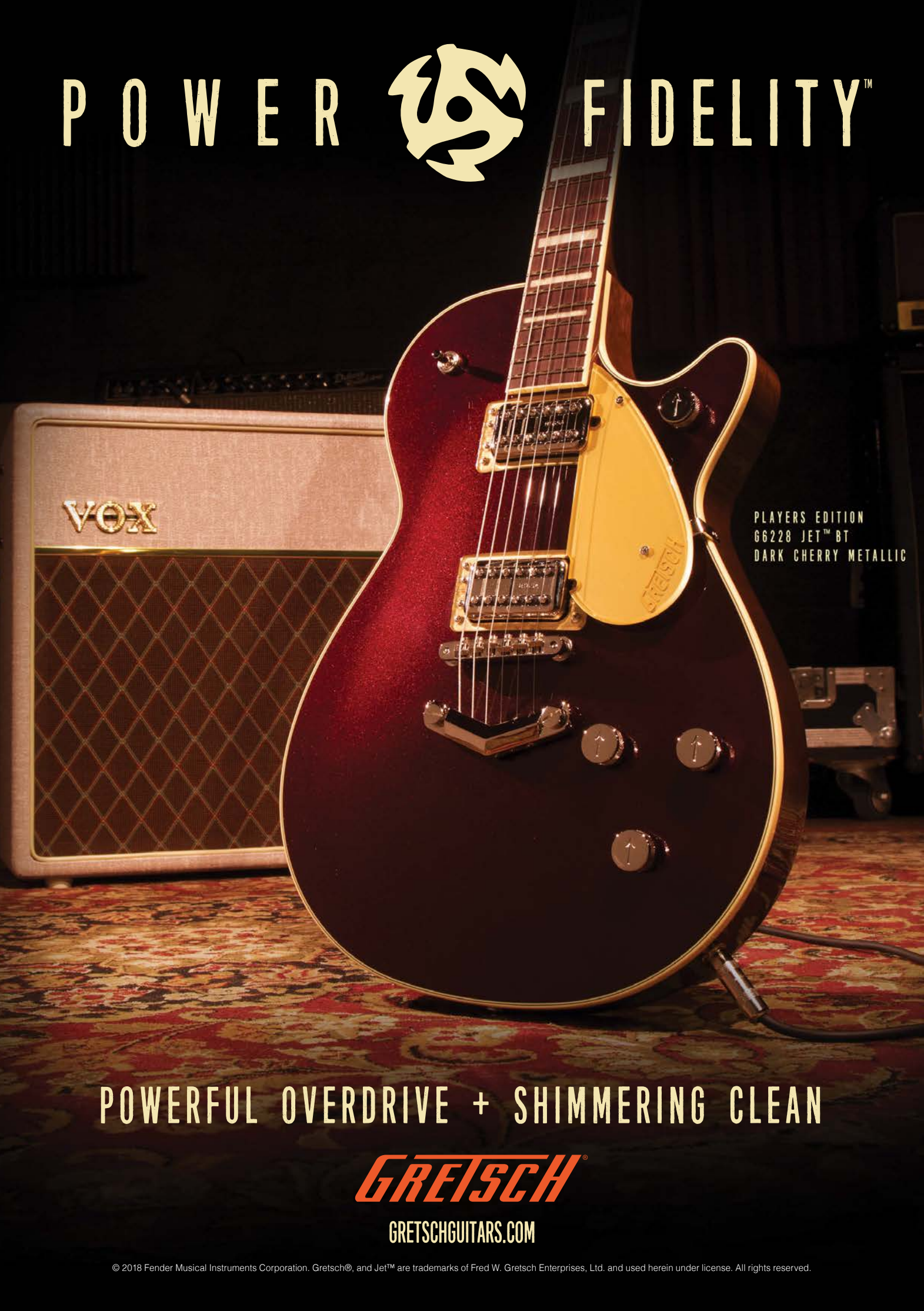

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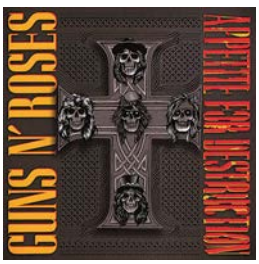
New Music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven new releases



Guns N' Roses
APPETITE FOR DESTRUCTION: LOCKED N' LOADED EDITION

ON The Guitar Magazine OFFICE STEREO

Three decades have passed since the sleazy rock 'n' roll charms of *Appetite For Destruction* conquered an unsuspecting world; and short of Slash coming to personally play guitar at your home, this expansive boxset celebration, available in a dizzying array of formats, is nothing short of a GN'R fan's ultimate fantasy fulfilled.

Collectibles range from a dozen 12x12-inch lithos of new track illustrations, to a 96-page booklet with unreleased photos from Axl Rose's personal archive. Lavish it may be, but there'll be much demand for the definitive version of a record that is still the all-time best-selling debut in the US.

Aside from the newly remastered and 5.1 Blu-ray versions of the album itself and 12 remastered tracks compiled from EPs and B-sides of the era, of interest for us is the release of 25 unreleased demos from a 1986 Sound City session.

The session features a 1986 run-through of the majority of songs that made up *Appetite*'s playlist a year later. Despite the presence of the intriguing but inferior *Shadow Of Your Love* and covers of *Heartbreak Hotel* and *Jumpin' Jack Flash* in place of later compositions *Mr Brownstone*, *It's So Easy* and *Sweet Child O' Mine*, the road-honed set, brimming with fire and energy, is all-but record-ready.

Urchins under the street they may have been, but they'd put the work in; captured in analogue fashion in this strange limbo state, it's fascinating to compare them to your own well-worn memories of the songs. Axl's banshee howl, unadorned with effects here, courses with punk venom; Izzy Stradlin, soul of the band yet mystifyingly low in the mix at times, adorns the sinewy McKagan/Adler rhythm section with skilfully woven stabs of classic rock rhythm. Yet it's Slash, BC Rich Warlock rather than Derrig Les Paul copy in hand, who lays down the mongrelised, soulful lead licks that launch the songs into the stratosphere: his solos and call-and-response leadlines are already fully formed.

All the raw materials were undoubtedly already in place here, and with hindsight, every decision subsequently made (the structural and compositional changes, the extra instrumental refinements) were the right ones. And while you'll need extremely deep pockets – the top-of-the-line boxset is a ludicrous £849 – this is nothing short of the sound of pent-up lightning being captured in a bottle. **BW**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Aerosmith, KISS, Mötley Crüe*

Patrick Sweany
ANCIENT NOISE

Ohio-born guitarist Patrick Sweany started out as a folky bluegrass aficionado, but the man who once counted Dan Auerbach as his sideman has followed a similar musical path, embracing a wealth of roots and blues influences, reshaping them into a wonderfully scuzzy rock 'n' roll gumbo. *Ancient Noise* doubles down on this, setting Sweany up with Grammy-winning producer Matt Ross-Spang in Memphis's legendary Sam Phillips Recording to create an album of raw blues-rock tunes that give equal weight to his varied, expressive guitar playing, and his raspy, emotive vocals. Opener *Old Time Ways* is built around Sweany's wonderfully filthy electric slide, offering foot-tapping hooks without ever becoming self-indugent. The Stones-y *Outcast Blues* is a wonderful example of how impactful and catchy some simple but considered blues riffing can be, while *Cry Of Amédé* is built on a call-and-response exchange between Sweany and his instrument. While his garage-rock contemporaries might be moving away from the music that made them stars, *Ancient Noise* demonstrates that the blues still has plenty to offer. **JG**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Black Keys, Black Pistol Fire*

Orange Goblin
THE WOLF BITES BACK

Raise your goblet of metal, it's time for another album of music to consume many, many beverages to from stoner metal institution, Orange Goblin. The London four-piece's ninth studio album certainly possesses the vulpine ferocity of the album title, but with a slightly darker edge than 2014's *Back From The Abyss*. The weighty and concise album opener, *Sons Of Salem,* sets the overall heavy tone of album – with typically potent contributions from guitarist Joe Hoare – but there is a musical diversity to the remaining tracks that has perhaps not been quite so evident on the band's previous releases. *Ghosts Of Primitives* and *The Stranger* have a dirty almost bluesy feel, while the booze-fuelled metal extravaganza of *Suicide Division* is a track that Lemmy himself would have been proud of penning. There's even space to squeeze in a dual-guitar led instrumental track in the form of classic rock-inspired *In Bocca Al Lupo*. It's all wrapped up in production that's designed to feel rough, raw and live – it's like you're stood at the front row of an Orange Goblin show… and that seems like a very fun place to be. **DC**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Metallica, Motörhead, Thin Lizzy*

Boy Azooga
1, 2, KUNG FU!

Boy Azooga's talent was made apparent to us as soon as *Face Behind Her Cigarette* – a radio-friendly earworm inspired by the analogue funk of William Onyeabor – was broadcast on BBC 6 Music. Davey Newington, quickly becoming indie royalty, plays almost every instrument on his debut LP, and in the process delivers an outward looking and explorative album that eloquently pays homage to diverse influences while maintaining a common thread. *Breakfast Epiphany* opens with blissful chamber-pop and esoteric percussion before crashing into the belter that is *Loner Boogie*. His romantic homage to *Pet Sounds' Don't Talk…* is evident on *Breakfast Epiphany II* before lulling into the *Innerspeaker*-inspired *Taxi To Your Head*, while *Losers In The Tomb* could comfortably fit on anything Gruff Rhys has written since *Mwng*. At its epicentre *1, 2, Kung Fu!* is a colourful and dynamic record, with lyrical content lilting from suburban dreams to black comedy novella. Davey ponders "Why does this song have to end?" on *Jerry* – we feel the same way about this album. A majestic debut that hints at even greater things to come. **SR**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Tame Impala, Super Furry Animals*

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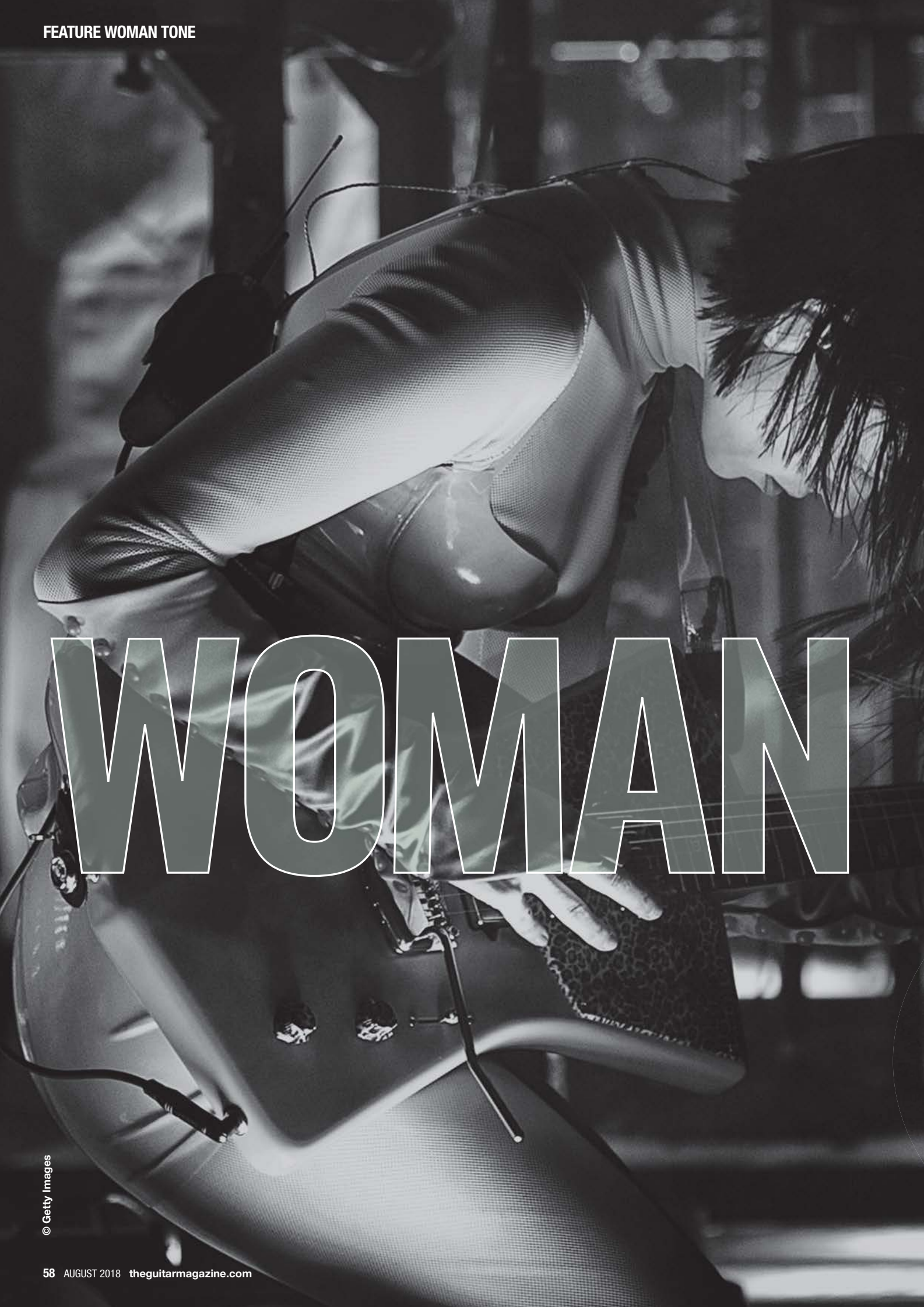

WOMAN

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TONE

"What's wrong with being sexy?" asked Nigel Tufnel in 1984's *This Is Spinal Tap*. It was a satirical acknowledgement of the fact that, even though most male rock artists of the era were plastered in more makeup and hairspray than the females in their audiences, the music business was far from a level playing field for women. Fast-forward to 2018 and while it feels like we're at a crossroads in gender politics in the wider world, has anything really changed for the better in the guitar industry, or is it as sexist as it ever was?

Story Thea De Gallier

© Eleanor Jane

Australian guitarist Orianthi has been a standard-bearer for women in the guitar world

It's a question that never goes away, and one that, as yet, hasn't been answered satisfactorily. Some will roll their eyes and groan at the mere mention of the word, while others will have earnest concerns. The question isn't about the merits of veganism or whether Brexit was a good idea – although they tend to elicit similarly polarised responses. It's this: is the guitar industry sexist?

Historically, it has often presented women as a prop. The NAMM show's 'booth babes' aren't seen with such regularity these days, but they're still there. *Rolling Stone*'s annual 100 Greatest Guitarists lists recycle the same male names year after year, with only Bonnie Raitt and Joni Mitchell deemed worthy of inclusion on the 2015 list (which also only had four women on a judging panel of 59). Influential female guitarists from all genres – Joan Jett, Orianthi, Nita Strauss, Tracy Chapman and Jennifer Batten, to name but a few – often find themselves relegated to 'best female' lists (although Strauss has just become Ibanez's first female endorsee). *Guitar World* only stopped filling its Buyer's Guide special with bikini-clad women in 2016, while *Revolver*'s 'Hottest Chicks In Hard Rock' feature was killed off with the magazine's change of ownership last year.

> "WALKING INTO A GUITAR SHOP USED TO BE VERY SIMILAR TO WALKING INTO A MECHANIC'S GARAGE"

Even notable female players sometimes unwittingly stall any critical thinking when they mistake fetishising female players for supporting them. "I tell ya right now, if a woman walked in here and looked like Pamela Anderson and played like Jimi Hendrix, there's not a band in the world that wouldn't be falling to her feet and saying: 'Will you be in my band?' Men like it when women can play guitar," said Chrissie Hynde in an interview back in 2016.

WHICH CAME FIRST?

What we're left with is a chicken-and-egg situation: did the guitar industry evolve as a male-dominated environment because fewer women played guitar, or did fewer women play guitar because they felt unwelcome and overlooked by the guitar industry?

"Even as someone from the industry, walking into a guitar shop used to be very similar to walking into a mechanic's garage," says Helen Varley, who looks after the Gretsch, Charvel, Jackson and EVH brands as Head Of Specialty Marketing at Fender EMEA. "It

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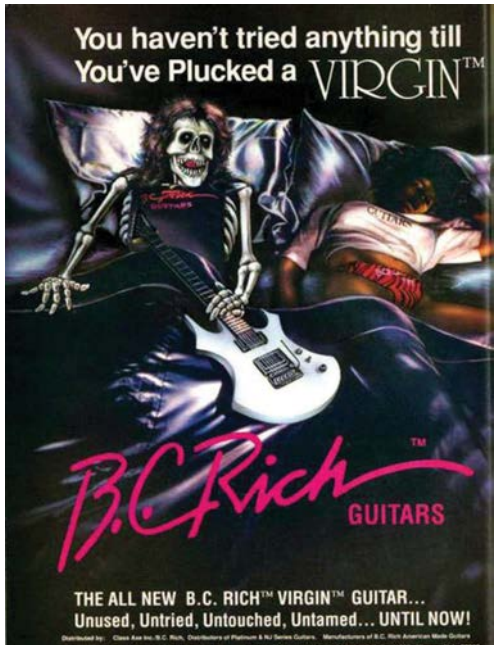

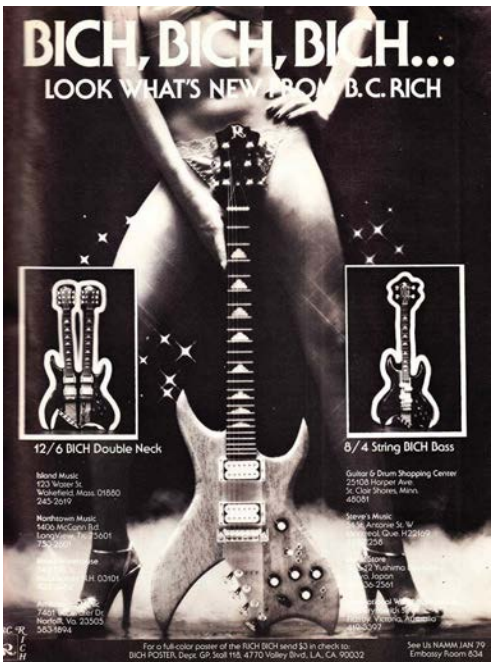

Above **As hard as it is to believe today, outrageous adverts such as these were commonplace in guitar magazines well into the 1990s**

Opposite top **Chantel McGregor has bemoaned the dismissive treatment that women can experience in guitar shops**

Opposite bottom **Sister Rosetta Tharpe was one of the many women who had a huge impact on the development of guitar music**

has changed; I've been working at Fender for nine years now, and when I first started, it was a bit of an old man's club. If you wanted to work for somewhere like Fender or Gibson, you had to know someone. If you were in a band it was like: 'Yeah I can work in marketing, because I was in a band', but they started to realise they can't just hire a load of ex-musicians; they need to hire people who are talented in specific disciplines."

Fender diversifying its recruitment policy has, Helen says, led to more women working in the company, but "my peers in other companies do seem to be chaps". In her experience, however, women are still uncomfortable when it comes to guitar shopping. "One female artist I'm working with didn't want to go into a shop and try the guitars out in front of all the guys," she says. "I said we could send the stuff to her house, or she could come to our invite-only showroom in London. Before we'd even got very far with the conversation, she was worried about how she was going to try the guitar out. I've not in my experience had that kind of reaction from any of the male artists that I deal with – they don't really give a shit!"

The reason for that self-consciousness could be a result of wider societal pressures faced by women, or simply because of a bad experience. "I walked into a guitar shop the other day with my father. The guy working there ignored me and just said 'hi' to my dad," remembered guitarist Chantel McGregor in a 2016 interview with *The Telegraph*. "So I told him exactly what I wanted – the precise specifications, using all the right jargon. He was dumbfounded that a girl could discuss music and knew what she was talking about. I've had people in shops ask me: 'Do you know what a plectrum is?' It's pathetic."

PUSHING UP DAISIES

Combatting the overly male environment of the guitar store was something that Tish Ciravolo set out to do when she founded Daisy Rock guitars in 2000. It's easy to see why the guitars themselves are sometimes scoffed at; shaped like flowers, covered in glitter and garish in poster-paint colours (although there are a couple of more subdued models in the range), they look like children's toys and might inadvertently give those already predisposed to casual misogyny another reason to dismiss women playing the guitar.

St Vincent, upon releasing her first signature model with Music Man in 2016, said she'd been "offended" by floral guitars as a Pantera-loving child (St Vincent designed her Music Man signature model with women in mind, giving it a streamlined shape and light body, but with the proviso that it was never intended to be for women only). Nevertheless, Tish started Daisy Rock with the best of intentions. "I started playing in bands in LA in the 80s and there were only a handful of girls who played instruments," she recalls. "When I went to a guitar store and bought my first bass, my boyfriend and the guy behind the counter chose the bass I should play, because they just didn't know how to handle a girl coming into a music store. It's not that they weren't nice, but it was an anomaly. I took home a Fender P-Bass, which felt like a baseball bat, so the next day, I took it back and sat in the store and played every bass they had on the wall until I found something I thought would fit me, which was a Yamaha BX-1 bass. That was my first indication that there weren't many girls doing what I wanted to do."

As Tish found out, finding a suitable weight took some testing of different models. Helen says that it's a case of knowing what you're looking for, and there's no need to market lighter guitars at women. "It's a myth that women need special guitars. A first-time buyer wouldn't necessarily know that there are 30 different woods that a guitar can be made of and that perhaps you should lead towards ash, because that's lighter than mahogany or

something like that," she says. "But what a guitar is made of is not its first selling point. If you look at the Fender Strat, over the years, it's been made of loads of different woods, and that's because of availability."

Tish admits she "didn't think of the ramifications of doing a pink flower, I just thought it would be something cool for my daughters", and concedes that "being gender-specific is not always the best". That said, she says that even if she were starting the company today, she'd still use the same designs.

"When I started this, four per cent of the guitar population was female. Now it's closer to 30 per cent, because of the guitar company I started. There are at least 500,000 girls out there that play because I started the company," she claims, backing it up by referring to statistics gleaned by looking at warranty cards for guitar sales over the last 20 years, and annual sales reports compiled by US magazine, *Music Trades*. Even so, she admits that Daisy Rock's profits are now "less than half" of the $2.5m the company was reportedly making in 2005.

GUITARS FOR ALL

Despite products 'for girls' being considered problematic in most industries, Tish is not setting out to diminish female guitarists; she simply wants, she says, to make the guitar a viable option for young girls developing an interest in music. Alba, a Spanish-born, London-dwelling guitarist and songwriter who played a number of European festivals, including Sonisphere, with her old band Sons Of Rock, agrees with the sentiment. "Starting early is key, and I don't think electric guitars are considered as gifts [for girls]. It's really important they aren't just considered as a male instrument," she says.

Finding female role models was difficult for her. "I started doing some research and I found so many pioneers that had been forgotten, like Sister Rosetta Tharpe. She was

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Joanne Shaw Taylor is one of the most recognised female guitarists on the UK scene, but she's still hugely in the minority

© Eleanor Jane

one of the first electric guitarists ever," she says. "There's a need for women to be there in those rankings in the media. They don't have the recognition they should."

None of that means that women aren't picking up guitars. Fender CEO Andy Mooney said last year that 50 per cent of all its new sales were to women. Helen says the statistics relate to the Fender brand itself, rather than her more alternative-leaning brands, and suspects many of those sales are of acoustic guitars. "We believe that that's generally because the ladies want instant gratification, but if you're looking at the electric world, you've got to buy a pedal, an amp, all these other nerdy things, and that doesn't broadly appeal to a lot of the females," she says.

Tish, when talking about Daisy Rock's early days, echoes this observation. "My husband [Schecter president Michael Ciravolo] helped me design them, he knows about pickups and frets and those things that are not exciting to me and never have been," she says. Hers and Helen's assertions that women aren't excited by the 'nerdy' side of guitars may be borne from their own experiences in the industry, but they're still perpetuating a stereotype to some degree; if even women working behind the scenes say that's how women view guitars, where does that leave those who are excited by the technical aspect?

How women interact with guitar brands is difficult to measure. "We only just started to sell direct as of last year on fender.com," Helen says. "Our route to market has always been the guitar shops, so we can only work out what's going on by looking at the TV and festival stages, and from the reorders from guitar shops. In the music industry and the record industry, there are societies that collate data, but we don't have anything like that for the musical instrument industry. We can buy research from the guitar magazines, but that's a very limited audience. I'm not entirely sure how many females would buy a guitar magazine..." However, even that tide may be turning thanks to emerging titles such as *She Shreds*, a magazine "dedicated to women guitarists and bassists."

SHARING THE STAGE

Festivals are a good example of the gender imbalance – a study last year found 80 per cent of headliners

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Alice Cooper guitarist Nita Strauss is the first woman to be given an endorsement deal by Ibanez

were men, and The PRS Foundation's Keychange initiative has been launched to try and achieve gender parity by 2022. The Great Escape and Liverpool Sound City are two of the 45 festivals who've pledged to do this. Download and Reading/Leeds, two of the most guitar-heavy – and male-heavy – festivals, haven't signed up, but their parent company Festival Republic is behind the Re:Balance scheme, a three-year project in which an industry committee picks female artists for studio time and commits to giving them a festival slot.

Other initiatives, such as the international DIY movement Girls Rock Camp Alliance, aim to empower women to take up the guitar. Girls Rock Camp began in Portland, Oregon, but now operates across the US and UK, with volunteer-run youth workshops that aim to foster self-esteem through teaching girls and non-binary teens to play rock instruments. Setting targets for women's participation garners mixed reviews. "If I was booking a festival, I don't think I'd want to be bound to booking half women just for the sake of it," says Aliases and Ravenface guitarist Leah Woodward. "If anything, I think that puts more of a divide on it. One half of me says it's a good idea to get more women involved, but I don't see a reason to give them a massive boost onto the stage because they're technically equal [in terms of talent] to any guy."

"IT SHOULDN'T MATTER WHO'S PLAYING IF THEY'RE GOOD AT IT, BUT GUITARS DON'T EXIST IN A VACUUM"

Helen takes a similar viewpoint. "I can't market something that's not good just because they're female and they tick the box," she says. "Obviously, I am very pro females playing guitar, but it's like all-women shortlists. I get it, but I don't agree with it, because you're not then winning on merit, you're winning because you're like a consolation winner."

Some would argue that doing things on merit would mean men continue to hog the limelight, purely because of the ratio of male-to-female musicians. But women in the industry, whether they're players or working on the gear side, don't want their gender to be their defining factor. "I don't care if it's played by a girl or a guy or a monkey, if it's good," laughs Leah. Of course it shouldn't matter who's playing the guitar if they're good at it, but guitars don't exist in a vacuum exempt from the sexism present in wider society. Quotas may not be a perfect solution, but the guitar industry, and the music industry at large doesn't accurately reflect the wealth of female talent out there. The fact that people have noticed this at last means that, hopefully at least, we're finally starting to see some progress...

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To achieve the unique finish on his Viking Series guitars, Gunnar submerges them in one of Iceland's volcanic hot springs – a precise, and potentially dangerous, process

THE ICE MAN COMETH

Gunnar Örn Sigurðsson has been making Orn Custom Guitars by hand in Reykjavík, Iceland for over 20 years, and his 'dipping process' is a concept he claims is a first in the art of guitar building. Lars Mullen flies north to see Gunnar's creations up close...

While there are plenty of stunning guitars being produced by skilled luthiers around the world, it's not often a builder can legitimately claim to be doing something unique and original in the field of guitar design. Gunnar Örn Sigurðsson can – and his approach is entirely inspired by his Norse heritage.

"I've always been fascinated by my Viking ancestors," Gunnar tells us when we visit his workshop in Reykjavík. "Especially the leather and steel tunics that made up their uniforms. This is a theme that runs throughout my Viking Series guitars, which includes the Mjölnir, Thorso and the Yggdrasil models. I've managed to successfully capture the old worn-leather look on the guitar bodies, especially the hand-carvings, although it's not a straightforward process."

The truly unique aspect of the process, however, comes in the way that he uses Iceland's most famous geological phenomenon in the making of the guitars, which ends up giving the wood a unique look that's akin to old leather...

"The guitar bodies are actually submerged in a volcanic spring here in Iceland," he tells us of this fascinating idea. "There are many hot springs, but I've been going to a particular one for years, far away from the tourist trail.

"The body is dipped in the hot water a specific number of times, it's quite critical and has to be accurate to the

Above **Hundreds of hours of work go into each hand-built Orn Custom Guitar**

Opposite, above **Minerals from the springs are left for a few days to infuse into the wood of the guitars' bodies**

Opposite, below **Body inlays are hand-carved by Gunnar's partner, Ylja**

second, so the wood doesn't scorch. It can also be dangerous, as the water temperature exceeds 100 degrees Celsius. This takes place, of course, before any hardware is fitted. The hot water contains a lot of natural minerals including sulphur, and the mud from the springs is rubbed into the wood while the body is still wet. This is left to dry on the body for a few days, so the minerals can work on the wood. The mud residue is then gently removed, rubbed to enhance the old leather look and sealed with an oil finish.

"I have a supply of this mud in my workshop if I need to apply more, but I have to open the windows when I open the containers! As far as I know, it's never been done before in guitar luthiery."

Iceland's volcanic landscape is a huge draw for tourists, of course, and the country has put it to good use by being a pioneer in the use of geothermal energy as well, but there have been few other practical uses for its by-products over the centuries – something that a young Gunnar often found frustrating.

GUNNAR HAS INSTILLED HIS GUITARS WITH HIS VIKING HERITAGE

"There have been very few constructive ideas for using the powers of Iceland's hot springs," he says. "Centuries ago, fishermen would lower their wooden barrels with iron hoops in the hot water. The iron hoops would shrink as they cooled and formed a tight seal around the barrels. I used to fish in the lake where the hot water drains when I was a kid, often wondering what could be done with all that wasted heat and water pressure!"

HAMMER OF THE GODS

Away from the unique finishes on the guitars, Gunnar has also sought to instil each of his guitars with aspects of his Viking heritage. The carved aluminium body plates on the guitars represent the Viking warrior's armour, the tailpiece is shaped like the 'Hammer Of God', while at the other end an aluminium design on the face of the headstock represents the nose guard on a Viking helmet. They obviously look stunning, but it's not just

about the looks – as there are tonal implications, too.

"The combination of the aluminium and mahogany contributes to a sustain and a brightness that I've not heard before," he enthuses. "The Yggdrasil V is a fine example. It's named after Odin's Tree Of Life, which also means 'good wood' and connects the nine worlds in Norse cosmology. It also has the 'Helm Of Awe' inlaid within the fretboard, which stands for the 'Great Protector' – one of the most mysterious and powerful symbols in Norse Mythology."

Aesthetics aside, Gunnar has also been very selective when choosing pickup designs to enhance the tonal characteristics of the Viking Series guitars. "I've tried several pickup brands, as I wanted to preserve the natural harmonics and sustain of the Viking Series," he explains. "I finally settled on a small company called Dominger, based in South Carolina, and also my own custom-wound Seymour Duncan humbuckers. I call them Volcano Mud, fittingly – they have a medium output with plenty of headroom, but they also clean up really well and enhance the lows and control the natural highs of the guitar's construction. I didn't want to go down the 'hot' route, where the trade off is a dark midrange tone with fewer highs.

His fascination with pickups isn't a recent development – in fact, these components were a gateway for Gunnar getting into building instruments of his own.

"I learned a lot about pickups when I was a kid," he explains. "The next best thing for me after fishing in the lakes was to swap out pickups and rewire guitars and hook them up to old valve radios."

Luthiery came later, but Gunnar is hugely passionate and serious about his craft, and brings a wealth of experience to each one he builds.

"I started to get serious as a luthier in 1996 and launched Orn Custom Guitars in 2000," he explains. "The Viking Series guitars are totally hand-built, taking in hundreds of hours. I keep the same theme throughout, although each one is slightly different and individual, maybe with an all-aluminium body, for example. It's a bit like nobody turning up to the party in the same suit! I have a basic band saw and router, but that's it; the inlays, carving and sanding are all by hand, here, with my partner Ylja. She has a trained eye and a very skilful, hands-on approach.

"I've stopped using rosewood because of the CITES regulations, so all bodies are mahogany or walnut, both of which actually respond best to the dipping process. My necks are mahogany, with ebony fingerboards – which is naturally oily to the touch. I like that and, of course, it's very dense and has excellent sustaining properties."

WOOD WORRIES

Iceland is a country of outstanding and unique natural beauty, but supplies of local wood are hard to come across, owing to both the near-arctic climate and widespread deforestation that occurred after the Vikings first arrived in 874 AD. This scarcity means that Gunnar has to look to more unconventional ways to source suitable tonewoods.

"I'm always on the lookout for interesting furniture that may

Top **The aluminium headstock inlay represents the nose guard on a Viking helmet**

Above left **The Mjölnir model can also be supplied in various configurations, including with a single P-90**

Above right **From a volcanic spring in Iceland to the Holy Grail Guitar Show in Berlin – here's Gunnar with the finished article**

appear in antique shops," he says. "But apart from that, quality tonewood of any kind is more or less nonexistent here in Iceland, as we don't have any forests to speak of. When people first settled here about 1,150 years ago, trees were plentiful, but they cut them all down to create pastures for the livestock they brought with them.

"We only really had one species of tree, which was birch. The sheep and cattle took a fancy to them; they ate all the seedlings so the trees couldn't grow back. The birch trees we have here now are protected. So I have to scour the internet for the best tonewoods from the likes of the USA and Europe."

Despite the struggles involved in actually sourcing the raw materials with which to build his creations, Gunnar's unique guitars are earning rave reviews both at home and farther afield.

"THERE ARE SO MANY BANDS IN ICELAND, COVERING ALL GENRES"

"I'm very pleased how popular my guitars are," he adds. "I was content in the past just to sell from my workshop here in Reykjavík, but having now built models for Iceland's most popular bands, such as Sólstafir, The Vintage Caravan and Of Monsters And Men, work is plentiful, especially after attending overseas guitar shows like NAMM in the USA and The Holy Grail Guitar Show in Berlin."

Indeed, the success of Orn Custom Guitars is a reflection of the huge arts scene that has developed in the small country.

"Iceland has a very healthy music scene; everyone you speak to is either writing a book, or is in a band," he chuckles. "I have my own band here called Strákarnir Hans Sævars, which has had the same line-up for 20 years. There are so many bands, covering all genres of music, although I would say rock leads the way.

"It's amazing really, as the population of the island is fewer than 338,000 – no more than a small city in the UK!"

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Gunnar Örn Sigurðsson proudly displays a range of his custom electrics in his workshop

However, while the bands are plentiful, the Icelandic climate can be a treacherous one for guitar owners, and it means that Gunnar also gets a lot of work on the side.

"It can be cold, of course, but the problem the guitars have is not so much Iceland's colder weather or the humidity," he explains. "It's actually that because our houses are so well insulated for the winter months, it's very common for acoustic guitars to develop cracks.

"I also have a repair shop where Ylja works flat out repairing cracked soundboards or bindings that have dried and come away from the body. We can handle just about any job that comes through the door: refrets and rewiring are everyday, snapped headstocks are also pretty common – there are some crazy players in Iceland! I did hear a story about a guy who filled up his Martin acoustic with water as it had dried out over the winter period. I'm not sure if that's true, it may have been an Icelandic myth; I do have a feeling it's true, though!"

"SNAPPED HEADSTOCKS ARE COMMON: ICELAND HAS SOME CRAZY PLAYERS"

BUILDING LIKE A VIKING

One of the most rewarding aspects of Gunnar's work at Orn Custom Guitars, however, is passing his wisdom on, and since 2007, he's also spent time teaching guitar-building classes at the Technical College of Reykjavíc. "It's very rewarding and fulfilling to see students start with a blank canvas and three months later, leave with a guitar in their hands," he tells us, as our chat draws to a close.

"Sometimes it can be quite emotional for them, as they didn't realise that they had this ability within them. A few of my students have asked if they could try and build one of my Viking Series guitars, but I have to say no... I wouldn't want to lose any of them in the hot springs!"

For more information about Orn Custom Guitars, visit www.ocg.is

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George's main squeeze is a made-in-Mexico Fender Stratocaster, with a Hot Rails coil-split humbucker fitted in the bridge

THE RAITT STUFF

He's worked with the great and good of the country scene and is celebrating 25 years of backing up Bonnie Raitt with a world tour. Bob Hewitt talks to Nashville-based guitarist, producer and solo artist George Marinelli about sanding down a '62 Strat and how he developed his inimitable 'scuffle' style over a fascinating career

When Bonnie Raitt hits our shores this month to open shows for her longtime pal James Taylor, the first lady of the blues, Americana and slide guitar will be backed up by her loyal band, most of whom have been with her for over 35 years.

Guitarist and multi-instrumentalist George Marinelli is celebrating a relatively modest quarter-century of laying down rocksteady grooves and tasteful riffs – as well as occasionally sharing songwriting duties – with Bonnie. A founder member of Bruce Hornsby And The Range, George has just released a solo album, *Burn It All Down*, laid down in his WingDing Recording Studio in Nashville.

Outside of his busy work schedule with Bonnie Raitt, George has also become a trusted collaborator with Nashville's country-music fraternity, and has undertaken production and session work for Vince Gill, Joe Ely, Lionel Cartwright, Wynonna Judd, Reba McEntire and Dixie Chicks.

We caught up with George at his Nashville studio for more insight into a musical career spanning over 40 years – including revelations about how his Mexican-made Fender Stratocaster plays just as well as his treasured oldie from 1962...

Growing up in an Italian-American family, what were your early musical influences?

"I grew up in New York – and my dad was a longshoreman working on the docks, and although there were no actual musicians in the family, there was always music playing – either on the radio or the record player. Mom and dad would listen to a lot of big-band stuff – plus Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett and Perry Como. I have two older sisters, and they were into Afro-Cuban music. So I was into that, too – aside from rock 'n' roll. There was always music going on, and I was kind of force fed, whether I wanted to hear it or not. All that rhythmic stuff gets into your system – especially when you're a little kid."

> "By the time I was 21, I was playing sessions in LA, alongside great musicians"

What started your career path in music?

"We moved to Los Angeles from Staten Island when I was 14. My mom used to save up Green Stamps – I wanted to play drums, but that was difficult in a small apartment – so she used up her stamps and got me a guitar instead for my 15th birthday. I was a slow starter as far as music goes, but in high school, we got some bands going and I joined a 'real band' when I was 19. I kind of fell into music by auditioning."

Living in LA at that time, did you hear lots of surf music?

"Yeah... The Beach Boys and a lot of that stuff – but at that time, it did nothing for me. There were a couple of songs I liked – I mean, Brian Wilson wrote some great songs. But I was more into The Wrecking Crew and all those LA session musicians. By the time I was 21, I too was playing sessions in LA – I don't think I ever got to play with any of The Wrecking Crew guys – but I did play alongside some great musicians. Moving to LA turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me..."

How did you get on with that original 'Green Stamps' acoustic?

"Ha – the action was so high, the strings were in a different area code. People ask me: 'What kind of guitar should I get my kid?'. I tell them to get a really cheap, funky guitar – because if they really want to play, they'll work through it. Back then, we didn't know they were lousy guitars, I just thought everything must be like that. If you're really driven to do something, you're going to plough through all the aches and pains – whereas nowadays, for $120, kids can go and buy a really nicely set-up Stratocaster."

So what did you move on to?

"My cousin, who still lived on Staten Island, had a Danelectro guitar and amp. He never bothered to learn, and only played it a couple of times, so it sat in a cupboard. They sent it to me and it was a killer copper finish with a single cutaway, and a really neat 1x12 amp that I haven't seen since about 1970. I left it at someone's house, and never saw them again. I really wish I still had it. That Danelectro guitar was great, but I eventually passed it

We caught up with Bonnie Raitt just before her show at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival in April for a glowing appraisal of her sidekick of 25 years…

"George has always been one of my favourite guitarists and people. I first became aware of him when he was with Bruce Hornsby And The Range, but then his playing in the China Club house band in LA knocked me out as well," says Bonnie. "What I love about what he brings to the table is his incredible versatility and vocabulary, his taste and chops. Growing up through the same musical era, he has a near-encyclopedic ability to call up every Stones, Beatles, Hendrix, Motown and soul, pop and rock song from nearly every decade. George can play jazz, African, blues, reggae and mandolin, too. We love so much of the same music – and he can draw on those influences from soundcheck jams to the studio... [and] always makes them his own.

"I love his tone, his choices – how he carves his sound from his wide array of great guitars, pedals and amps. He comes up with such cool and inventive voicing and parts and slays on ballads as much as soul and rockers. For me, he's one of the best guitarists I've ever heard and a great inspiration to my music."

onto my seven-year-old nephew who said he wanted to learn to play. Some years later, I said to him: 'What happened to that guitar I gave you? I wouldn't mind having it back if you're not using it'. He replied: 'Well, we were building a toy fort – and we needed the wood'. He chopped it up! I kind of walked out in disgust. My dad helped me out and I bought a Gibson SG Special, with the two P-90s and that generic Gibson whammy bar. I liked it, it was a really neat guitar."

How did you link up with Bruce Hornsby?

"At that time in LA, everyone was playing in different bands... sort of mix-and-match. People would call up and say: 'Hey – do you want to do this gig?'. I was playing with Billy Vera & The Beaters, and we'd had a couple of regional hits and one national. I got a call from a drummer who was working with Bruce – then [later] Bruce called me and asked if I wanted to play on some demos. I said: 'Sure', and eventually, we became really good friends. A year or so later, Bruce says: 'Hey – do you want to form a band?' I said: 'Well, I'm already in five – what's one more?'"

That first Bruce Hornsby And The Range album really took off, didn't it?

"It really did – much to our surprise! We recorded *The Way It Is* in 1985 with David Mansfield on fiddle and mandolin. Trouble was, when it came to going on tour, David said he couldn't go, because he was heavily involved with the film score for a movie called *Heaven's Gate*, and he had a scene in the movie playing fiddle. So I ended up playing mandolin as well – it was *not* an instrument I chose voluntarily! We released a single – and the album's title track *The Way It Is* ended up on the B side. But that's the one that gave us a big hit, first in the UK, then over in the States."

You only did two more albums – then left?

"Yep – I left The Range when I left Los Angeles for Nashville in 1991. Nashville producer Tony Brown used me a lot, and he helped put my name on the map. I'll be forever grateful to him for that, because it meant a lot of other producers called me up, too."

How did your connection with Bonnie Raitt come about?

"So, I was busy with sessions in Nashville – but I was also good friends with Bonnie Raitt's bass player Hutch [James Hutchinson]. We spoke on the phone, and I said: 'Tell Bonnie I want to be in the band' – but it took another couple of years for that to happen. When Bonnie did eventually call, she said: 'Can you come over and audition?'. But I said I was really busy with some sessions – so she said: 'Okay, well just come and play on the album anyway.' After a few days in the studio, Bonnie asked if I wanted to be in the band – I said yes!"

What's the secret of the band's longevity?

"You know, except for the keyboard chair, it's been the same line-up since 1983. There's Ricky Fataar [famed South African drummer who's played with The Flames, The Beach Boys and The Rutles] and bassist James 'Hutch' Hutchinson [Willie Nelson, Joe Cocker, BB King and The Doobie Brothers] – they've been with Bonnie forever. I'm like the 'new guy' – only 25 years! It's hard to say what makes it 'click'. We're all friends... and the 'two guitars' thing – Bonnie and I really like the Stones, and it's a complementary thing, that kind of 'sloppy weaving'. Of course, our job is as sidemen, so we're there to complement whoever is out front."

How would you describe your guitar style?

"Well, I've heard my style described as 'a scuffle' – halfway between a shuffle and something else. You know Ricky is really good with that, too. He's one of maybe four drummers in the world who can do that 'in between' thing – like Jim Keltner, Ringo Starr and Charlie Watts. It's the whole thing that makes rock 'n' roll different from rock music – the roll sort of got lost, but it's that Chuck Berry style that's kind of related to the swing of big bands. Chuck didn't necessarily have melodic and chordal knowledge, but he had that swing groove that so many guitar players nowadays don't have a clue about... A lot of it is 'athletic playing' these days. It's like talking too fast – nothing stays with you."

In light of that, what advice would you give to younger players?

"Listen to as many different types of music as you can – don't just lock into one. Listen to African music... Celtic and Caribbean. If you really want to communicate more than

one little idea, you need to speak more than one language, and you need to have colours on your palette... I mean, BB King and a handful of players like Jeff Beck, Keith Richards and Eric Clapton can play just a couple of notes – but straight away, you know who it is."

Tell us about some of the standout artists you've worked with…

"I've toured Europe and the UK briefly with James Taylor, covering for Michael Landau. Right now, we're opening shows for James on the current tour, so I get to see Michael every day. I played with Ray Charles on his last-ever album, *Genius Loves Company*. Bonnie was scheduled to do a duet with Ray – so she called me up and asked if I would like to play on the track *Do I Ever Cross Your Mind*... I said yes, of course!

"After we cut the song, Bonnie introduced me to Ray, and I held up my little camera and took a photograph of the three of us together. Sometime later, the record company called me up and said they didn't like the official photos from the session... could they use mine? I cropped myself out of the image, so it was just Ray and Bonnie, and that's what ended up on the album – and all over the media. For a minute there, I was a paid photographer."

Guitar-wise, you're most associated with a Fender Stratocaster…

"Well, my very first Strat got stolen – but I've got my old '62 that I bought second-hand when I was 20. I only had a Fender Mustang case at the time, so I carefully sanded about an inch-and-a-half off the guitar body to make it fit in the Mustang case – I was flat broke and couldn't afford a proper Strat case... so I ended up taking all the Sunburst finish off, and it's been that way ever since. That guitar used to belong to Journey's Neil Schon – but from when he was playing with Santana. In 2000, my stuff went missing for five weeks, so 'my babies' don't go out on the road anymore. The '62 Stratocaster, an early 70s Telecaster, a 1964 Gretsch Tennessean and a '66 Epiphone Cortez acoustic – they all stay at home."

What about your main gigging guitars?

"When all that equipment went missing, I called into Nashville Used Music and tried every Mexican-made Stratocaster in the store. I played about 15 of them – then this Candy Apple Red just jumped out at me. I mean, it played fantastic and sounded as good as my old '62. I only made one alteration to it – I changed the bridge pickup for a Hot Rails, as I wanted to be able to split from a humbucker to single coil. I also bought an old Telecaster I found on the back wall of a consignment store. I stripped the finish off, same as my old Strat. It was $250 and it's a killer... plays and sounds great. So they are my two main guitars I play on stage.

"I have another 'T-style' made by a company called Tradition, and I have that tuned down a half-step for certain songs. I have an Eastwood baritone guitar for a few numbers, they're great guitars that stay in tune and sound fabulous. It looks a little like a Mosrite – and I have it tuned down two steps."

How about backline?

"I use two Dr Z Maz Juniors. I have one from 1995, and I wanted another to take on the road with the same tone characteristic, so [Mike Zaite] built me another that sounded identical. When I go into the studio, I can pretty much get any sound I want out of the Maz Junior heads. I use the non-reverb models, with open-back cabinets, loaded with Celestion 30s. I also have an old brownface Fender Bandmaster I've owned forever."

What about pedals?

"I use a Boss GT-8 multi-effects processor – and for years before, I used the GT-5. I own three of the GT-8s – I have one here in the studio, and take the other two out on the road. I bought them in 2002, and I've never needed the spare. For 16 years, these things have been around the world so many times – they're built like a tank. I like the great sounds and they never let me down. I don't like individual pedals, power supplies and cables running everywhere; I just program a bunch of sounds I like. One cable in and another out to the amp – that's it!"

So when will we see you back in the UK?

"We're touring with James Taylor throughout the States at the moment – then we come over with James to the UK and Europe for dates in July... it's going to be a great show."

George with his sanded-down ex-Neil Schon 1962 Strat

(l to r): 'fat neck' Tele', Tradition T-style, Ed Klein S-type, Mexican Strat and Eastwood baritone

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DEATH 0:1 ELVIS

Probably the most useless debate in the world: Is Elvis alive?

No question. He'll still live on long after everyone who now claims he is alive has died.

It is his music that made him immortal - along with Janis, Jimi, Wolfgang Amadeus, Freddie and all the others. Many of them lost the battle against drugs, alcohol and their inner demons far too soon. But they all had vanquished death long before.

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MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

COLLINGS I-30 LC

The Texan company reinvented the ES-335 with its much-admired I-35 model. Now it's the turn of the ES-330. Chris Vinnicombe takes a look under the hood...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

The Collings Guitars story began in the mid-1970s, when Bill Collings moved from Ohio to Houston, Texas, ditched his pre-med course in favour of an engineering job and began building guitars in his kitchen. Although Bill sadly passed away in July 2017 following a battle with cancer, he left behind a formidable instrument-building legacy and a company famed for its exacting standards whose instruments are loved by artists around the world.

Though Collings' reputation as one of luthiery's leading lights was built on his flat-top and archtop acoustics, the company introduced its first mandolins in 1999 and by 2006 Collings was building electric guitars, too. First seen in prototype form at Winter NAMM then officially unveiled in November 2017, put simply, the Collings I-30 is to the Gibson ES-330 what the I-35 is to the ES-335.

Although its inspiration comes directly from Gibson's golden-era in Kalamazoo, a closer look at the I-30 reveals that a series of intelligent refinements have been carried out down in Austin, Texas. Aside from its more compact 15-inch lower bout, the most dramatic departure from the ES-330 blueprint can be discovered by peering through the I-30's bass-side f-hole. Unlike the hollow interior of an ES-330, the Collings features parallel trestle braces.

A CLOSER LOOK REVEALS THAT A SERIES OF INTELLIGENT REFINEMENTS HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT DOWN IN AUSTIN, TEXAS

Though trestle bracing was pioneered by Gretsch in the late 1950s and is much more commonly associated with that particular G-brand, the principle in the context of a Gibson-style design is the same: by coupling the guitar's top to the back you increase sustain and also decrease its susceptibility to feedback. Here, inside the I-30, the Honduran mahogany neck is also coupled to the tail block via the bracing design. Along with the extra-long mortise and tenon neck joint, this promises to be a recipe for the I-30 LC to have more solidbody-like sustain characteristics.

The trestle bracing certainly doesn't add solidbody-style weight to the equation – at 5.3lbs the I-30 isn't going to give anyone back trouble.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

If you can track one down, the Memphis-made **ES-390** is **Gibson's** own scaled-down take on the ES-330. **Eastman's T184MX** (**£1,999**) is a compact hollowbody with Lollar Custom Wound Imperial humbuckers, a carved mahogany back and maple top. Featuring a chambered mahogany core and bookmatched bigleaf curly maple front and back, the sublime **Frank Brothers Signature Model** is available with numerous custom options from **$3,650**

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Above **The I-30 differs from a classic Gibson ES-330 in the use of sustain-enhancing, feedback-suppressing trestle bracing inside**

Although there's a touch of neck dive – something that's not uncommon with compact hollowbody designs – it's easily balanced by our right forearm when playing and doesn't cause discomfort.

Everywhere you look, this guitar bears testimony to the attention to detail exhibited during the Collings R&D and build processes. The arched three-ply maple top and back are constructed with grain orientation and ply thickness optimised for weight, acoustic response and feedback resistance. The outer layers have a breathtaking flame that shifts dramatically depending your viewing angle and, combined with occasional flecking, it's reminiscent of the timber used by Gibson during the Burst era.

The way that the rear body binding continues seamlessly around the heel is another marker that we're dealing with virtuoso guitar manufacturing, while the ultra thin (between 0.005-0.007 inches) gloss nitrocellulose finish has been applied flawlessly. Collings' 'haircut' headstock outline is still one of the most elegant twists on a vintage theme and here it's capped with an ebony veneer and mother of pearl logo.

If we're being fussy, a thicker pickguard with a more generous bevel might have a more appealing, vintage-style appearance, but overall this is a seriously good-looking electric guitar. And not just in this glossy Blonde incarnation, either – the 'aged finish and hardware' option in Jet Black is so cool it hurts. Time to stop swooning and start playing…

IN USE

The I-30's construction translates into an acoustic voice that's loud, woody and pushes single notes forward like a cannon. Sustain is impressive, while the neck's soft-shouldered C profile has a subtle hint of V that's reminiscent of the best Gibson necks of the 1950s and is sumptuously comfortable. With every decade of playing that passes it'll no doubt feel even better.

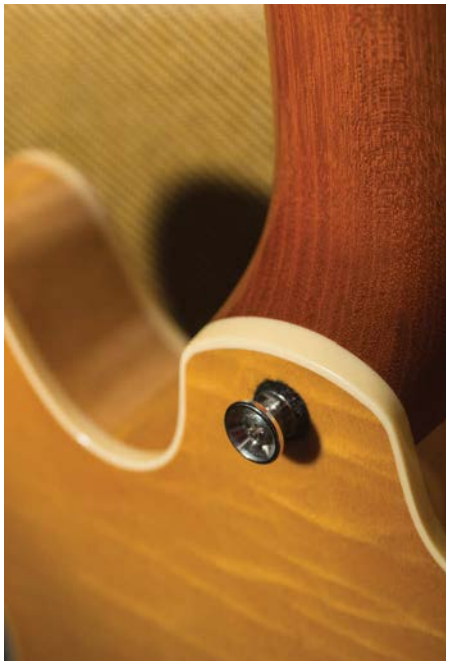
Unlike an ES-330, the 335-style 19th fret neck join on the I-30 offers access to all 22 of the guitar's beautifully installed medium-jumbo frets, while bending strings at that kind of altitude isn't as cramped an experience as it can be in the tighter cutaways of other scaled-down Electric Spanish outlines.

Although the ES-330 and Casino have a reputation for indie jangle and Britpop crunch, the I-30 feels like a smooth soloist's guitar – certainly more Grant Green than Paul Weller. Into a clean tweed amp with a splash of spring reverb, the scope for expression offered by the Lollar Dogear P-90s is broad. Crank up the amp for some throaty overdrive and there's no shortage of girth – the I-30 delivers fat, raunchy P-90 tones that are thick like molasses. It's more Grissom than Lennon, more Texas than Abbey Road Studio Two.

THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF GIRTH… THE I-30 DELIVERS FAT, RAUNCHY P-90 TONES THAT ARE THICK LIKE MOLASSES

As with any hollowbody design – trestle braces or not – at gig volumes with grit dialled in, you have to pick your spot carefully before embarking on the tightrope walk between musical feedback and a maelstrom. Grabbing a more traditionally constructed ES-330 style guitar with a 16-inch hollow body for comparison (in this case an Eastman T64/v) the Collings blooms into feedback in a less vicious and more controllable manner than the Eastman. Where the larger hollowbody quickly erupts into a midrange-y howl, the Collings stays musical for longer.

With suitable ambient effects, this edge-of-feedback zone is one



KEY FEATURES

Collings I-30 LC

- **PRICE** £5,099 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Hollowbody electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Maple laminate body with non-grained ivoroid binding and parallel trestle braces, set Honduran mahogany neck, 12" radius rosewood fingerboard with non-grained ivoroid binding and mother-of-pearl 5mm dot inlays, 22 medium-jumbo 18% nickel-silver frets, ebony headstock veneer, bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Kluson ABR-1 bridge (nickel-plated zinc w/ retaining wire), Collings trapeze tailpiece, nickel Gotoh tuners w/ ivoroid buttons
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Lollar Dogear P-90 pickups w/ custom phenolic covers, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch, 50s-style wiring with 2x volume, 2x tone controls (DiMarzio 500K) and Jupiter Vintage Yellow capacitors
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.8"/631.8mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.2mm at nut, 52.4mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.2mm at first fret, 25.1mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36.1mm at nut, 53.0mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 5.3lb/2.4kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes (10% upcharge)
- **FINISH** Blonde gloss nitrocellulose. See website for custom options, left-handers and finishes
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815
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  www.collingsguitars.com

of the most fun areas to inhabit in all of guitardom. Providing you ride it carefully with either the onboard controls or a volume pedal, it's possible to create no end of spooky atmospherics. That movie-soundtrack gig awaits…

Rolling back the volume until we're no longer on the edge of a precipice, it's interesting to note that the Eastman's Duncan Antiquity P-90s have livelier upper harmonics than the Lollars and the bigger body also delivers deeper bass. In contrast, the Collings has a fuller helping of midrange cream and a sophisticated smoothness, while simultaneously offering more push and a level of sustain that's more like a solidbody or centre-block equipped semi.

There's no getting away from the fact that five grand is a lot of anyone's money to drop on a guitar, and with that kind of budget you could pick up a stellar vintage Gibson hollowbody that will appreciate in value over time. That said, the Collings is a guitar for life too, and it's been built with a level of love and care that is rare even in this lofty price bracket. You might even prefer the smoother ride it offers…

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Superlative build quality
+ Fantastic 50s-style neck profile
+ A classy blend of hollow and solidbody characteristics

– Some may prefer airier trebles

Much more than simply a downsized, boutique take on an ES-330, the I-30 has a personality of its own that offers much to love

9/10

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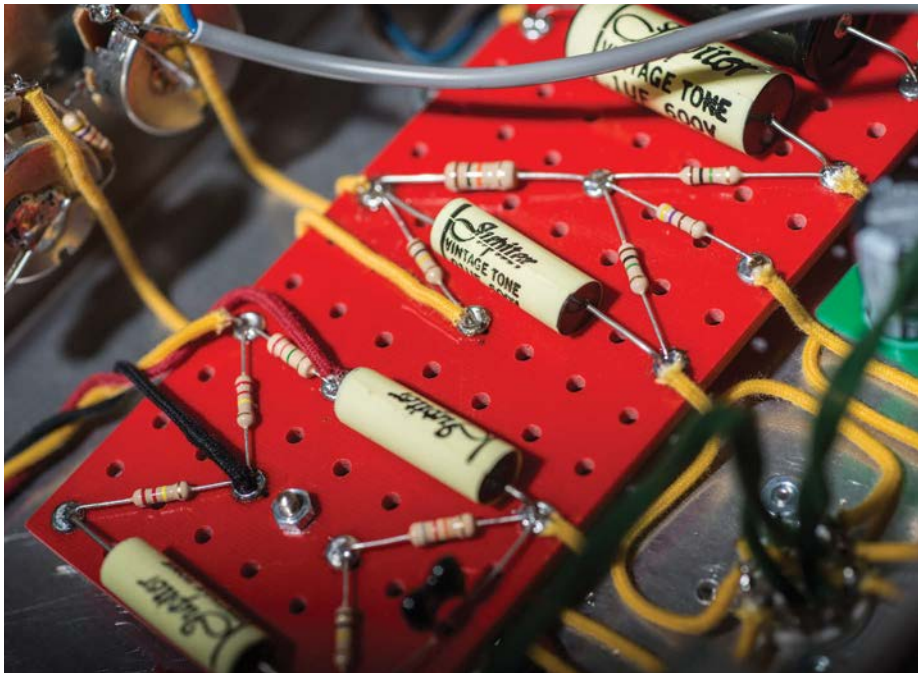

RIFT AMPLIFICATION HAWKER

Having forged a fine reputation building replicas of the classics, Rift is moving into the boutique market with an original design based on the best of British. Huw Price takes the Hawker for a test flight...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

For his first all-original amp design, Rift main man Chris Fantana wanted to explore the sonic heritage of great British guitar amplification. But instead of venturing down the rather well-trodden Plexi path, Fantana has taken inspiration from Selmer, Watkins and (to a lesser extent) Vox circuits. The Hawker attempts to capture some of that vintage vibe without the typical downsides, such as a lack of power, excessive compression and a shortage of clarity and detail.

Starting with the KT66 – because it was the most 'British' power valve he could think of – and cathode biasing for even-order harmonics, Fantana developed his ideas from there. Rather than trying to recreate the sound of a specific amp, Chris was striving to achieve a certain feeling and dynamic response. The result is a hand-wired, single-channel 30-watt combo with a Warehouse BlackHawk 12-inch alnico speaker in a plywood cabinet. As a concession to modernity, there's a bypassable solid-state effects loop, along with a master volume and a full complement of tone controls.

A front-panel switch drops the power to eight watts by routing one leg of the post-phase-splitter signal to ground, while the unused KT66 continues to conduct current. This clever method maintains the correct output-impedance relationship and the hum-cancelling of a regular output stage, while promising attenuation without tonal compromises. The Hawker's custom-wound power transformer is also configured for two HT taps – allowing selectable valve and solid-state rectification via the rear panel's two-position toggle switch ('push' being solid state and 'pull' being GZ34), while maintaining the same operating voltages in both modes.

THE HAWKER ATTEMPTS TO CAPTURE SOME OF THAT VINTAGE BRIT AMP VIBE WITHOUT THE TYPICAL DOWNSIDES

IN USE

The notion of 'British' tone means different things to different people, but there's definitely nothing on the Hawker's tonal palette that's 'American'. The key characteristics are a compressed, lower midrange growl that accompanies the onset of clipping, and an airy treble sheen that floats over the top without becoming ice picky. In clean mode, this treble characteristic provides Strat single coils with an almost acoustic prettiness. As the midrange thickens with overdrive, you do hear something closer to the throaty chime of a vintage Watkins or a Vox.

The key to getting the most from this amp is to use your ears rather than your eyes when setting the volume and tone controls. That may seem like a statement of the obvious, but we often work on the assumption that nothing much changes between one and two or nine and 10, because that's so often the case – here it isn't.

To illustrate, we continue with the Strat, max out the master and raise the volume. Almost immediately, the Hawker delivers a loud and full-bodied clean tone, and taking it a fraction higher, we're into that hinterland of not quite clean and not yet dirty. Taking things a notch further, overdrive intensifies noticeably and the volume control has only reached two.

KEY FEATURES

RIFT AMPLIFICATION HAWKER

- **PRICE** £2,299
- **DESCRIPTION** 1-channel cathode-biased valve combo with effects loop, switchable solid-state/valve rectification, plywood cabinet. Made in the UK
- **POWER RATING** 30W/8W switchable
- **VALVES** 7025, 12AY7, ECC83 (preamp) 2x KT66 (power amp) GZ34 (rectifier)
- **CONTROL PANEL** Input, volume, treble, middle, bass, master, presence, 30W/8W, power on/off
- **REAR PANEL** 2x speaker outs (8 ohm + extension), effects send, return, loop bypass switch, effect level, push/pull rectification mode switch
- **SPEAKER** 1x12" Warehouse BlackHawk Alnico
- **DIMENSIONS** 605x540x230mm
- **WEIGHT** 23.8kg/52.4lbs
- **CONTACT** Rift Amps 07480 067871 **www.riftamps.com**

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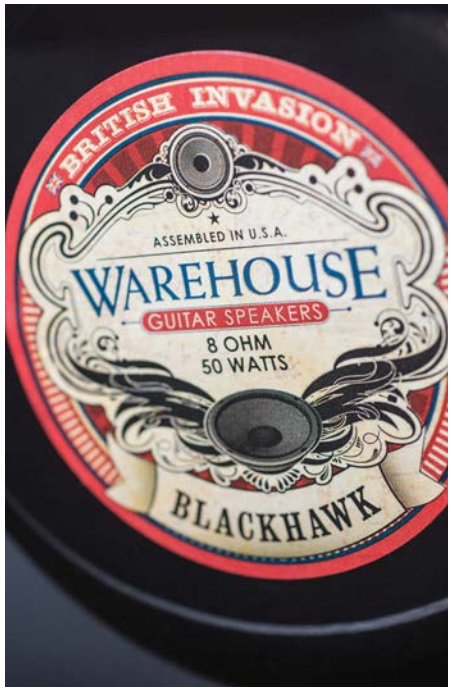


LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Hamstead Soundworks Artist 20+RT** (**£1,899**) is another British boutique combo that doesn't follow the herd. Other Brit-inspired amps to audition include the wonderful **Morgan AC20** (**£1,649**), **Carr Lincoln** (**£2,249**), **Swart Mod 84** (**£2,149**) and the **Gartone Regal 45** (**£1,895**)

We've lucked into a glorious tone, combining a midrange roar with lively upper mids and trebles. There is a delicious hint of ragged looseness in the lows, but it can be tightened up by rolling the master back to seven and compensating for level by raising the volume to around six. In doing so, we detect changes in the overdrive characteristic and dynamic response that occur because more overdrive is being generated in the preamp valves, while the power valves aren't being pushed as hard.

THERE'S NO DENYING THAT THE HAWKER PROVIDES ENORMOUS SCOPE FOR GAIN AND TONE SCULPTING

A thicker and gruffer midrange quality emerges, along with a narrowing of the dynamic range, as poppy attack eases into creamy sustain. Reversing our starting settings, with the volume now on 10 and the master around three, the anticipated wall of filth doesn't materialise and instead, we get something far more interesting. The midrange actually begins to lose its girth and gruffness, which in turn allows the sound to breathe a little more clearly. You get all the crunch and singing sustain you might expect from a maxed-out preamp, but the lively dynamics return – along with even more detail and expression.

Phew… all that and we haven't even altered our tone controls! Reverting to a more neutral sound that's just balanced on the cusp of overdrive, we explore the tonal range. Since the Hawker has a presence control, we start by determining how its effect differs from the treble pot. Both operate in a similar frequency range, but increasing the presence induces overdrive in the upper mids and makes the Hawker more touchy feely. For maximum cleans and the tightest response, we find it better to back off the presence and increase the treble. The tone controls are refined and have wide usable ranges – not unlike studio EQ – however, they are also highly interactive. For instance, rolling back the middle and cranking the bass creates a hotspot where the treble control's response becomes very pronounced from six to eight – much like a fixed wah effect.

There's no denying that the Hawker provides enormous scope for gain and tone sculpting, so next our attention shifts to its other features. The 30-watts/eight-watts power switch certainly lives up to Rift's promises and we think the two power options are just right. 30 watts will get you heard in most situations, and eight watts through an efficient driver (such as the Hawker's 100.08dB Warehouse BlackHawk Alnico) is about as much as you can use at some venues these days, before the sound engineer starts complaining.

Since the Hawker comes with a very efficient speaker in a sizeable cabinet, both settings sound bigger and louder than their wattage ratings might suggest and they produce essentially the same sound at different levels. If you do need to tweak the tone, the controls comfortably deal with any perceived discrepancies. The switchable rectification's effect on tone is fairly subtle, although you may detect a tad more treble in solid-state mode. It really makes its presence felt on low-end definition and dynamic feel, but we have no clear preference, because selection depends on amp settings and volume. When pushing the output stage hard in eight-watt mode, diode rectification tightens the lows and prevents things from sounding overly compressed. Conversely, tube rectification at higher volume and lower master settings enhances touch dynamics and keeps the Hawker feeling responsive.

Besides some roughness on the Tolex corners and curves that can be put down to this being a prototype, the build quality, style and sound all impress. The Hawker has the smoothness, sustain and dynamic response of the best hand-built amps, and a price to match. It combines a raft of practical features and surprising versatility with a distinctive voicing, and more than holds its own at the top level.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Wide tonal and dynamic range
+ Practical real-world features
+ Power reduction without compromising
+ A joy to play

– We'd love to hear it with onboard reverb

As a first venture into ground-up amp design, the Hawker is a revelation – and any fan of classic British amps will find much to enjoy

9/10

POWER
DWELL
ROOM
SPRING
PLATE
LEVEL
OMNI
REVERB

KEELEY ELECTRONICS OMNI REVERB

Keeley's latest reverb may be low on knobs to play with, but that doesn't mean it's predictable... Richard Purvis dwells on the heavenly simplicity of the Omni 'verb

Have we become greedy with our reverbs? A few years ago, if you wanted to add space to your live sound, you'd have to make do with the spring tank in your amp; now the average reverb pedal has algorithms for plates, halls, cathedrals, sci-fi caverns and the cupboard under the stairs in your uncle Derek's house.

Originally launched as an exclusive for US retailer Sweetwater late last year, Keeley's compact Omni Reverb is a tidy compromise for guitarists who want a bit of digital versatility, but without all the frilly bits: it has two controls and a three-way mode switch, plus a couple of internal slider switches… and that, in tweakage terms, is your lot. Those knobs at the top control the intensity of the effect and how long it hangs around for, while the sliders let you select true or buffered bypass and 'wet only' output for use in a parallel loop.

IN USE

Sound-absorbing wall panels, stand-mounted reflection filters, old rugs nailed to doors… some of us spend a lot of time and money trying to get rid of room ambience. But as a subtle way of adding depth, it can be smoother than a juddery spring 'verb – and we're hoping that's the case here, as a room sound is the first of the Omni's three modes.

Well, it's as smooth as you care make it. With dwell set short and reverb level high, we're not far from the clanging slapback effect of an uncarpeted garage; but at longer and less dense settings, it's easy to get a more natural, pleasing decay.

NOTES HANG AROUND FOR WEEKS, AND YOU CAN LAYER THEM TO CREATE SWIRLING CHORD EFFECTS

There's a bit of added background hiss with it, but nothing truly irksome. Switching to spring mode, the same knob settings give much longer and livelier sounds, and the Omni certainly nails the splashiness of a real reverb tank. Nice stuff… but it's the plate effect that really makes this an interesting pedal.

Right from the start, we know we're dealing with a bigger and brighter kind of reverb now; and cranking both controls catapults us straight into the otherworldly realm of post-rock atmospherics. Notes hang around for weeks, and you can layer them to create swirling chord effects that sound beautifully immersive while, somehow, not swamping whatever you choose to play over the top. We've enjoyed playing around with this kind of reverb many times before, but rarely has it sounded quite so pretty and addictive. The option to engage buffered bypass in order to let the decay trail away when you turn it off is welcome, as ever, but in the case of our review pedal, that does also mean a bit of reverb – and hiss – seeping into the dry sound. This is only a major issue with the level set self-indulgently high, though.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

For similar reverb sounds, but with added tremolo and vibrato, the **Keeley Hooke Reverb** (£179) is worth a sniff. Otherwise, try the **Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail Nano** (£115), the dependable **Boss RV-6** (£129) or the versatile **Fender Marine Layer Reverb** (£110)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ A US-made reverb that focuses on getting the basics right
+ Convincing spring effect
+ Worth buying for the glorious and inspiring plate mode alone

– Not on general release on this side of the pond... yet
– Our review sample 'leaks' a little in buffered bypass mode

Elegant and pure of tone, the Omni is a fine digital reverb for those who prize clarity and simplicity

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Keeley Electronics Omni Reverb

- **DESCRIPTION** Digital reverb pedal. Made in USA
- **PRICE** $129
- **CONTROLS** Dwell, level; room/spring/plate switch
- **FEATURES** Internal switches for true or buffered bypass (with trails) and wet-only output; powered by 9V mains supply or battery (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 111x67x47mm
- **CONTACT** Robert Keeley Engineering **www.robertkeeley.com**

THE FAT
GENERAL
KERCO

THORPYFX
FAT GENERAL

Adrian Thorpe's new compressor marks the start of an ongoing collaboration with a stompbox legend. Richard Purvis stands to attention...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Like many mythical creatures, Dan Coggins is only sighted at rare and unpredictable intervals. The designer behind the hugely collectable Lovetone pedals of the late 90s, Coggins last emerged from his Oxfordshire lair in 2014 with two new Dinosaural units – a fantastic overdrive and an arguably even more fantastic optical compressor. And then things went quiet again.

Enter ex-Army major Adrian Thorpe, a relative newcomer on the stompbox scene whose products have become renowned for military-grade construction and top-class tone. Put these two talented boffins together and who knows what magic will emerge? Well, to start with we get the Fat General: a new version of that short-lived Dinosaural compressor, the OTC-201, circuit-tweaked and redesigned to fit in one of Thorpy's signature tank-like enclosures.

Like many modern compressors this one does parallel processing, letting you blend the dry and treated signals so you can keep things subtle and prevent any important frequencies being squished out completely – a particular godsend for bassists. What you also get here is a switch to disengage the blend function and turn the balance control into a volume knob, with a certain amount of clean boost on offer.

It's just as robustly built as all of Thorpy's units, with supreme attention to detail on the inside and control knobs protected from stray boots by a raised metal shell, this time in yellow. We're not big fans of grey chickenheads on stainless steel, and those etched markings aren't the most legible we've ever squinted at, but this is a solid piece of kit with the looks to match its hefty pedigree.

THE OVERALL SENSE OF ADDED PRESENCE AND THICKNESS MAKES THE FAT GENERAL FIENDISHLY ADDICTIVE

IN USE

Adrian says 'blend' mode is his favourite, and we're not about to argue. With balance set halfway and sustain around 10 o'clock, the result is as pleasing as an unexpected pay-rise: it might not change your life, but it makes everything feel a little bit better. The effect on dynamics is pretty minimal – it's more about adding sustain than aggressively flattening transient peaks – but the overall sense of added presence and thickness makes it fiendishly addictive.

'Juicy' mode is a shortcut to the real squishing action, and you'll need to exercise restraint with the sustain control here to keep things sounding natural. But for bringing out the elasticity and bite in clean Telecaster picking, it really is bang-on – and the ability to kick your amp into overdrive by cranking the output level is a genuine bonus. The treble control, meanwhile, should let you replace any top end that's been compressed out; we never found that to be an issue, but enjoyed using it to pile on extra zing anyway.

This is a superb debut creation for the Thorpe/Coggins design alliance, and one that we're really keen to see expand into other areas – we'll be the first in the queue if they do.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Adds meat and sparkle to clean tones in a beautifully addictive way
+ Switchable parallel mode adds real flexibility
+ Sounds great on bass
+ Build quality is impeccable as ever

– There are cheaper options that sound almost as good

A classy and versatile compressor that's so good, you'll almost never want to turn it off

9/10

KEY FEATURES

ThorpyFX Fat General

- **DESCRIPTION** Optical compressor pedal. Made in UK
- **PRICE** £219
- **CONTROLS** Treble, sustain, balance, blend/juicy mode switch
- **FEATURES** Buffered bypass; powered by 9V mains supply or battery (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 145x70x60mm
- **CONTACT** Thorpy FX **thorpyfx.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Earning a rare 10/10 from us, the **Origin Effects Cali76 Compact Deluxe** (**£269**) promises studio-quality compression in a stompbox. More modestly priced options include the excellent **Keeley Compressor Plus** (**£129**) and the fruity **Orange Kongpressor** (**£119**)

FRACTAL AUDIO SYSTEMS AXE-FX III

The high-end digital modelling phenomenon returns with a third iteration that promises significant upgrades both inside and out. Darran Charles plugs in...

Above **The Fractal's rackmount form factor returns, making it suitable for both the road and the studio**

Opposite **The old green LCD display has been replaced with a full-colour display that's 30 times the resolution of its predecessor**

Fractal Audio Systems' Axe-Fx redrew the high-end digital modelling landscape when it arrived on the scene a decade ago, quickly becoming a fixture in the touring and recording rigs of some of the biggest and most influential guitar players in the world, thanks in no small part to its mix of top notch tone and rock-solid build quality.

Fractal's success sparked a high-end modelling arms race that has since seen the likes of Kemper, Positive Grid and Line 6 bringing their own variations on the theme to market, but the Axe-Fx remains the benchmark for many guitarists out there – particularly those at the heavier end of the spectrum. As a result, it was a shock when, at this year's Winter NAMM show, Fractal unexpectedly launched the Axe-Fx III, which supersedes version II, released back in 2011 and last upgraded in XL+ form in 2015.

So what's new with the Axe-Fx III? Firstly it boasts nearly three times the processing power of version II, and with two 1GHz digital signal processors and dedicated graphics and USB processors onboard, the Axe-Fx III can rightly claim to be the most powerful unit of its kind on the market.

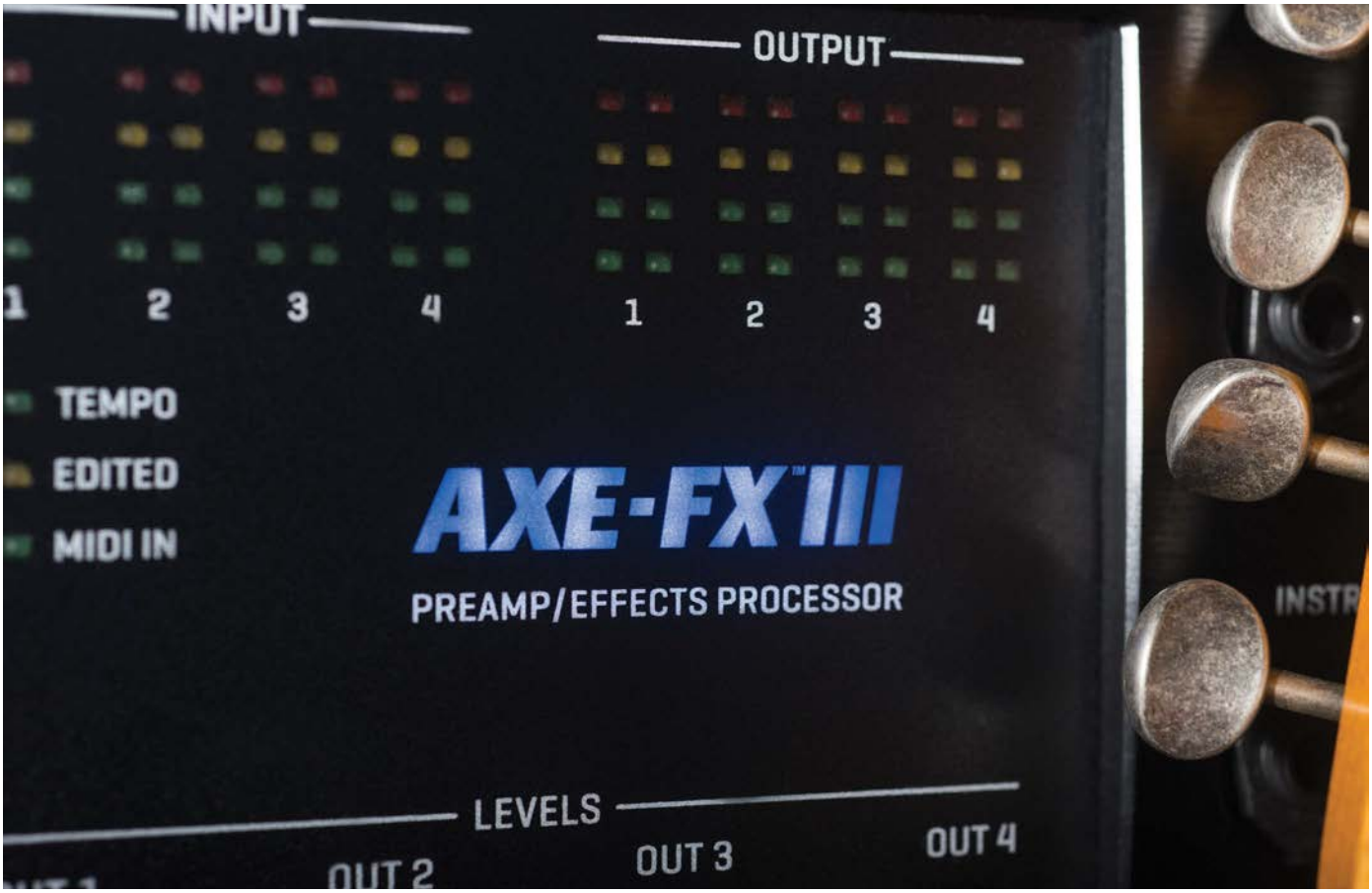
The interface has also undergone some major changes, and perhaps the most striking is the front panel display. While relatively simple to

use, the antiquated green and black screen of old was a bugbear for some Axe-Fx users, and its low-resolution never really reflected the cutting edge technology under the hood. The new high-contrast display, however, is 30 times the resolution of its predecessor and the detailed animation of modifiers and meters will be much welcomed by users new and old.

The Axe-Fx's robust and durable rackmount chassis has been retained, and the manufacturing quality is strikingly apparent – this is not just a piece of studio equipment, it has been designed to withstand the rigours of touring. This road-ruggedness is something that sets Fractal apart from the crowd.

HANDS ON

There are hundreds of virtual amps on board, accessed via 400 presets – each one consisting of an entire



Above **The Axe-Fx III offers an increased number of LED meters so you can keep track of the levels of all four input and output sockets**

virtual rig. Everything you could reasonably wish for is here: vintage Marshalls, Fenders, Mesas, Diezels – even near-mythical Dumbles. And with over 2,000 virtual cabs at your disposal, the tonal permutations are mind-boggling.

Presets can be selected by turning the large 'value' knob, or at a more leisurely pace by using the left and right arrow keys. A new feature on the Axe-Fx III allows you to select different 'scenes' of a particular preset by using the up and down navigation keys. But more on those scenes later…

Editing is similar to the Axe-Fx II in principle, but a redesign of the front panel means you now have five knobs, labelled A to E, positioned at the bottom of the display. These correspond to the interchangeable menus featured on the bottom of the screen and both press and rotate depending on which parameter/menu you are selecting or editing.

By clicking the 'layout' button you can view how each preset is constructed. This function brings up the grid (a matrix of rows and columns bookended by the 'input' and 'output') and it's here that you construct your virtual rig. A new 'zoom' function enables you to view the entire grid on just one screen (previously it was only partially visible and navigated by scrolling left and right).

Present on the grid are 'blocks'. Blocks can represent amps, cabs and effects, and are linked together in the same manner as a physical amp and effects chain. For example, if you simply want an amp, cab and wah pedal, then in this instance you would insert the wah block before the amp block, and then the amp into the cab block. Should you want to insert an effect into the mix that traditionally would be in the effects loop, you can insert this block between the amp and cab. It's pretty straightforward and intuitive, but with the block grid equipped with 14 rows of six slots, the sonic and switching possibilities are almost limitless.

THE AXE-FX III CAN RIGHTLY CLAIM TO BE THE MOST POWERFUL UNIT OF ITS KIND ON THE MARKET TODAY

The functionality for both scenes and channels has been developed significantly for the Axe-Fx III. Channels can be imagined as a separate preset for an individual block, and whereas previously you could only switch between two settings, now you are able to switch between four distinct settings in a single block. Using the reverb block as an example, you could perhaps set channel A for a spring reverb, channel B for a small hall, and so on. This used in conjunction with the scenes offers a wealth of footswitchable options.

Ah yes, the scenes. Scenes dictate what blocks and channels are engaged or bypassed. An example of how you might use them would be setting up different scenes for clean, rhythm, and lead. The clean scene could feature channel one of the amp block set as a Fender-type amp with the compression and reverb blocks engaged; the rhythm scene could be something like a Marshall-style model on channel B of the amp block, but now with the compression block disengaged and a drive block engaged; finally, the lead scene could feature some delay, and use the same Marshall, but with a more powerful drive on channel B of the drive block.

You could of course simply switch between presets instead, but using this method there will always be a slight delay (albeit an almost immeasurable one) because the Axe's brain has to carry out a number of processes, including clearing the buffers and muting audio. By opting to use scenes, you get an almost seamless transition between sounds.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fractal's most notable rival is the **Kemper Profiler Rack** (**£1,488**), though a number of other digital modellers have recently been vying for our attention including the **Line 6 Helix Rack** (**£1,069**). A much cheaper alternative exists in the form the **Avid Eleven Rack**, which retails for a modest **£333**

KEY FEATURES

Fractal Audio Systems Axe-Fx III

- **PRICE** €2,899
- **CONTROLS** 800×480 colour display; 5 endless rotary push-encoders; home, edit, store, tempo, enter, page left, page right; 4 arrow buttons; 8 LED meters; 3 status LEDs; value rotary; 4 output level knobs
- **INPUTS/OUTPUTS** Front panel: 1/4" input jack; 1/4" stereo headphone jack. Rear panel: 1/4" jack (unbalanced) instrument input; 2 XLR/1/4" combo jacks (balanced) inputs; 2 pairs L&R 1/4" jacks (balanced) inputs; output 1: L+R (stereo) XLR-Male (balanced), and L&R 1/4" jacks (Humbuster) outputs; Output 2: L+R (Stereo) XLR-Male (balanced); Output 3: L+R (Stereo) 1/4" jacks (Humbuster); Output 4: L+R (Stereo) 1/4" Jacks (Humbuster); S/PDIF input & output; AES/EBU input and output; 2 No. Expression pedal inputs 1/4" jack; FASLINK II Connector; USB; AC Power; MIDI in, out, thru; Ground lift
- **DIMENSIONS** 482.6 x 131.1 x 292.9mm
- **WEIGHT** 15.24lbs/6.87kg
- **CONTACT** G66 +49 461 182 8066 **www.g66.eu**

Above right **The Axe-Fx III offers more inputs and outputs than ever before**

IN USE

Speaking of sounds, with the sheer volume of amps onboard it's hard not to feel slightly overwhelmed. For familiarity's sake, we begin by investigating some of our past and present favourites.

First up is the 'JVM OD2', which is an emulation of the OD2 channel on a Marshall JVM410 head. The three gain stages present on the actual amp are here and selected by scrolling through the scenes labelled 'green', 'orange' and 'red'. Pleasingly, all the sonic characteristics of a souped-up JCM800 are here, and in orange mode without a noise gate engaged, the gain-laden, hissing anticipation of a super-heavy rock tone about to be unleashed, sounds and feels unerringly familiar. The sheer weight and clarity of tone provided by a fraction of power amp sag and some rounded-off high EQs proves to be as joyful as the real thing.

Next up is a Mesa/Boogie Mark IV emulation. With the amp block set to 'USA Lead+' the definition is once again astonishing. Just by strumming through sus2 chords you can hear the distinctive, slightly scooped but harmonically rich sound associated with John Pettrucci. The punch and power is incredible: the characteristically biting but slightly-tamed treble and presence sets the stage for some technical lead playing. And just like the Mesa amp that it's an emulation of, it's unforgiving, with any shortfall in technique highlighted mercilessly!

A Fender Strat equipped with Texas Specials through the 'Double Verb' preset (based on the venerable Twin Reverb) provides sumptuously punchy cleans on the neck pickup but when switching to a bridge humbucker engages a sweet break-up that provides a perfect platform for slightly overdriven blues licks. Vintage amp aficionados may notice some differences between their own treasured amps and Fractal's models, but as you get used to using the Axe-Fx, the need to compare with the real thing evaporates – especially as you begin looking for your own sounds. If you're really determined to emulate the sound of your favourite players, however, Fractal's Axe Change website features a wealth of community-sourced presets that you can download to your unit.

The onboard effects are simply sensational and of the highest studio quality. The stable of sounds on offer has also expanded – there are now more reverbs, drives, delays and modulation effects to choose from, as well as many new effect blocks.

There's much greater competition in the high end amp modeller market since Fractal Audio first arrived on the scene 10 years ago, but the Axe-Fx III cements its place as the market leader simply because of the sheer flexibility on offer. This is a serious – and mobile – piece of studio or live equipment capable of providing the tones for any musical project.

The vast range of tweakable parameters that Fractal offers sometimes comes in for criticism when compared to the simplicity of other units, and perhaps there is an element of justification there. However, these functions are there if you need them: most of us would be happy using the traditional EQ sculpting controls and not much else, because the presets offer such well-voiced starting points for your tone.

The Axe-Fx III also represents an entire live rig. More and more guitarists today are running a modeller straight into the desk and this method takes a lot of uncertainty out of live shows because, quite simply, the sound you programmed at home or at rehearsal will be identical to the tone coming through the PA (as this reviewer can attest).

While an upgrade from the Axe-Fx II might not seem immediately necessary, the inclusion of over 2,000 new cabs is a difficult prospect to resist. Add to that the improved effects blocks, the unrivalled processing power, and the rate at which Fractal develops and distributes new firmware, it's almost certain that within six months, the Axe-Fx III will leave its predecessor – and many of its competitors – trailing in its wake.

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Outstanding audio quality and three-dimensional tones
+ Dynamically responsive to individual playing nuances
+ Road-rugged build quality

– You'll need to give the instructional manual a read before diving in
– It's a serious investment

For vivid emulations of hundreds of amps that respond dynamically to every nuance of your playing, Fractal once again blazes a path for others to follow

9/10

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- 1 of 65 ever made
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Anniversary Model. Finished in Iridium Silver & Azure Metallic. Made in Japan. Filter'tron Pickups. With Gretsch Hard Case.

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PRS SE Bernie Marsden 53/10
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Circa 2006. Finished in Blue/Black Burst Flamed Top. Stunning! Mint Condition. With original Hard Case and Tags. Photos online.

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£499

Burns Double 6 - 12 String
Finished in Red Burst. Fantastic Condition. Lovely tone and easy action. High res photos and more info online. With Hard Case.

Pre-owned
£2,199

Rickenbacker 330/12 Fireglo
12 String. Fireglo. Fantastic condition. Circa 2009. Comes with Original Hard Case, Tags and Duster. Photos online.

New
£1,699

Rickenbacker 620/6 Mapleglo
Deluxe Hollow Body with a special contoured body. Rosewood Fingerboard with Triangular Inlays. Made in USA. With Hard Case.

New
£2,359

Rickenbacker 4003 Midnight Blue
Brand New! Stunning Deep Blue finish. A Classic Timeless Bass guitar. More Photos & info online. Comes with Hard Case.

Pre-owned
£1,699

The Heritage H150M
Circa 2001. Finished in Chestnut Sunburst. 2x Seymour Duncan '59 Humbucking Pickups. Fantastic condition. Original Hard Case.

Pre-owned
£1,499

Top Hat King Royale 35 Combo
Circa 2004. 2x12" Valve Combo. 35 watts. AC30 Based. Handwired. 2 channels. EL84 Power Valves. 12AX7 Pre-amp Valves.

Pre-owned
£449

Laney L5T-112 (Made in UK)
Last of the UK made Laney amplifiers. 5 watts of valve power. 12" Celestion Green back speaker. Cover and manual inc.

Pre-owned
£299

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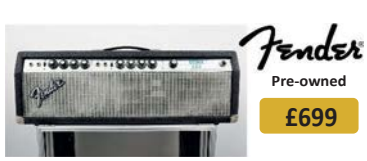

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£699

Fender Bassman 135 (Silver Face)
Circa 1979. Fantastic condition. Big Clean Fender Tone. 4x 6L6 Power Valves. More info and photos online.

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EARTHQUAKER DEVICES **PYRAMIDS**

A digital flanger with some distinctly non-flangey tricks and a dual-function footswitch? Richard Purvis unlocks the mystery of the Pyramids...

We don't seem to review a lot of flangers. Is it because of their association with 80s indie/goth doom-scaping? Maybe, but we're all sonic adventurers nowadays, and a flexible flanger is capable of so much more than that cold metallic whine. Take the Pyramids from EarthQuaker: an eight-knob digital beast with stereo operation, eight sound modes and five preset slots. This is not your old three-knob stomper.

Sitting somewhere between chorus and phasing, but with the potential to be more disorientating than either, the flanging effect was pioneered by studio engineers messing about with synchronised tape machines in the 60s. It's existed in stompbox form since the 70s, but maybe it was waiting for the current age of sophisticated digital processing to really seize its moment as a versatile tone-warping tool.

To that end, the Pyramids offers eight different flanging effects in one box: four of them more or less 'standard' in type, two triggered by playing dynamics, and two offering sample-and-hold stepped filter sounds. The five factory presets cover a lot of ground, but you're going to have to get to know that array of knobs; and while rate, width and mix are fairly self-explanatory, the others are a little more arcane. 'manual' changes the delay time of the modulated signal, 'feedback' controls how strongly it regenerates, and 'modify' has a different role depending on the mode selected. Taken together, they're basically your three-dimensional weirdness factory.

IN USE

Never mind sounds, let's first talk about footswitches – because the bypass switch here is a bit clever, using EarthQuaker's Flexi-Switch tech to be both latching and non-latching: tap once for normal on/off functionality, or hold to keep the effect engaged only until you lift your foot off again. It seems so simple and works so well that we're left wondering why every effects pedal ever made doesn't do this.

Once we've got over that little thrill, we ease ourselves in with the conventional flanging effects found in 'classic' mode. Used in moderation, this is a pretty tasty way of adding colour and movement to a flat tone, especially going through two amps in stereo. 'Through-zero' mode is similar in style, but with an element of tremolo, while the two 'barber pole' options introduce a more pronounced phaser-like swirl.

The triggered effects are somewhat extreme but work as you'd expect, and you can use the 'modify' control here to adjust the sensitivity to pick attack. And while 'random' and 'step' modes take things in a dramatically synth-like direction, it's the power of all those knobs that really fuels the Pyramids: twiddle them for long enough and you'll find everything from a Leslie-like shimmer to jarring ring modulation, with hints of all sorts of other wobblinesses in between. You could get lost for a long time in these Pyramids.

TWIDDLE THE KNOBS FOR LONG ENOUGH AND YOU'LL FIND EVERYTHING FROM A LESLIE SHIMMER TO JARRING RING MOD

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Multi-mode flangers are actually more common than you might think these days. Obvious rivals to the Pyramids include the compact **Alexander F-13 Neo Flanger** (£169) and **Chase Bliss Audio Spectre** (£349), and the space-hogging **EHX Flanger Hoax** (£212)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Offers plenty of modulation sounds beyond the classic 'jet engine'
+ Sounds way cool in stereo
+ It's got a magic footswitch!

– A standard multi-effects unit might make more sense for some players

An impressive creative tool with hidden talents to uncover

8/10

KEY FEATURES

EarthQuaker Devices Pyramids

- **DESCRIPTION** Digital stereo flanger pedal. Made in USA
- **PRICE** £319
- **CONTROLS** Manual, rate, width, mix, feedback, modify; rotary preset switch (1-5 plus 'live' manual setting), 8-way rotary mode switch, slow/normal/fast division switch, latching/non-latching bypass footswitch, tap/trigger footswitch
- **FEATURES** Stereo inputs and outputs, expression pedal input; true bypass; powered by 9V mains supply only (included)
- **DIMENSIONS** 123x108x61mm
- **CONTACT** Audio Distribution Group +45 6574 8228 **earthquakerdevices.com audiodistributiongroup.com**

MONTY'S GUITARS
MORE! DOUBLE BOOST W/ LOOP

A double-barrelled helping of +15db plus an effects loop to hammer both ends of your pedalboard simultaneously. Michael Watts does his best Dickensian orphan impression and asks for More!

Monty's Guitars is one of London's best kept secrets when it comes to hand-made custom pickups and wiring harnesses for the discerning electric guitarist. Originally starting life as a repair shop, the company has become something of an armoury catering to players on a one-to-one basis. To be released in extremely limited numbers, the More! boost is the company's first venture into the wonderful world of effects pedals, and was designed in collaboration with Audio Kitchen guru Steve Crow.

The packaging of any product often speaks volumes about the intent behind it. The Monty's Guitars More! arrives in a glass mason jar filled with straw. Once successfully extracted, we find that the pedal itself is shrouded in luxurious black tissue paper closed with a wax seal like a sonic papal bull. Pick the change out of that, your Grace…

The brains of the More! are housed in a small metal enclosure with a textured matte black finish. Meanwhile, the logo and control labels are screen-printed in a powerful shade of hot pink last seen by this reviewer

EACH BOOST CHANNEL, WHILE IDENTICAL IN DESIGN, CAN PLAY A DISTINCTLY DIFFERENT ROLE IN YOUR CHAIN

adorning a 10-string BC Rich Bich in the halcyon summer of 1985.

Each of the two footswitches is accompanied by an LED for visual reference and rather than standard control knobs, the More! features hexagonal volume nuts which once tightened allow a 'set and forget' approach to your gain stage.

IN USE

The More! is a JFET boost of two parts, and it is worth noting that each half, while identical in design, can play a distinctly different role in your chain. The 'More is More' half provides a crowd-pleasing +15db and has its own loop that hits any pedals in its chain. This will not necessarily make your signal louder, instead it adds a shot of ferocity to whatever you have put in the loop.

In practice this takes a Catalinbread Fuzzrite vintage Mosrite-style fuzz (think *In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida*) straight into saturated Muff territory with almost infinite sustain. A Crowther Hot Cake becomes a snarling, fire-breathing hard rock machine and even a pretty insipid Leslie simulator acquires new gravitas and poke.

The 'More and More!' half of the pedal is designed to go somewhere near the end of your signal chain. This time the boost hits the front end of your unsuspecting amp. Hard. This effectively gives your amp (in our case a hand-wired Vox AC4) an extra channel and is handy when it comes to cutting through a band mix for solos.

For an ostensibly simple pedal the More! proves extremely versatile, affording the player an 'always on' high-quality transparent boost with the 'More is More' engaged and immediate access to as much grunt as anyone is likely to need with the 'More and More!'. It is however, with the inclusion of the effects loop, that the More! really comes into its own, adding power, detail and dynamic range to anything you plug into it.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

If you like the idea of a boutique boost but don't need a double then check out the **Jam Pedals Rooster Booster** (£185). If you're on a budget then the **Danelectro Billionaire Boost** (£69) punches way above its price category

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Simple and effective access to great tones
+ Versatility is only limited by your imagination when using the effects loop
– 'Landscape' pedals don't always sit easily on a board

A high-quality hand-made pedal, the More! is for guitarists who like their boosts how they like their entendres, and are intent on unlocking inspiring new sounds from their existing effects chain

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Monty's Guitars More!

- **PRICE** £180
- **DESCRIPTION** Twin +15dB boost pedal with effects loop. Made in the UK
- **FEATURES** 2x volume controls (tightenable for 'set and forget' operation), 2x on/off footswitches, input, output and FX loop in/out 1/4" jacks, 2x on/off LEDs, 2x independent 15dB JFET boost circuits, effects loop between boost channels, 9-18V DC mains power supply only (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 112 x 61 x 31mm
- **CONTACT** Monty's Guitars 07921 916053 **www.montysguitars.com**

HOUSE OF TONE
TEXAS TEA T-SET

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Legend has it that, for a short while in the mid-50s, Fender changed the recipe of its Telecaster pickups – and House Of Tone has recreated one of those mysterious sets. Huw Price studies the formvar...

KEY FEATURES

House Of Tone Texas Tea T-Set

- **PRICE** £65 each/£145 set
- **DESCRIPTION** Hand-wound vintage Tele-style pickups. Made in the UK
- **SPECS** 42 AWG heavy formvar magnet wire, alnico V slugs, copper-plated steel inductance plate (bridge), open top nickel-silver cover (neck)
- **DC READINGS** Bridge 9.5k ohms, neck 7.4k ohms
- **CONTACT** House Of Tone Pickups 07791 691251 **houseoftonepickups.com**

The idea for this pickup set stems from a longstanding rumour. Although vintage Tele pickups are generally assumed to have been wound with magnet wire coated in plain enamel insulation, there may have been a brief period when this wasn't so. When the Strat was introduced in 1954, Fender wound the pickups with heavy formvar-insulated magnet wire, and there are reports that some Tele pickups were briefly wound with formvar at that time. Nevertheless, if there was a change, it was temporary and Fender soon reverted to enamel for Teles while retaining formvar for Strats.

It's widely accepted that formvar and plain enamel wire sound different, so to see how much these mythical formvar Tele pickups would differ from the norm, House Of Tone decided to recreate a set by using formvar wire in an otherwise standard mid-50s formula that includes flat alnico V slugs, a copper-plated steel inductance plate and parcel string wrap for the bridge.

The neck pickup gets the formvar and alnico V treatment, too, but a different approach is taken with the cover. This set has an open-topped nickel silver cover that's intended to eliminate the wooliness and muddiness that blights some Tele neck pickups with traditional closed chrome-plated brass covers.

IN USE

One thing these pickups won't give you is shrillness, and any concerns we have about excess top end and ice-pick attack from a bridge unit with formvar wire are quickly dispelled. There's plenty of treble, but it's characterised by a refined smoothness. With the plain strings, this translates to jangle rather than sheer cut, and on the wound strings, you get a clucky twang rather than wiriness. However, the most interesting stuff happens in the midrange, and we think it defines this pickup's voicing. There's no discernible scoop, and the fullness bolsters single notes for a smooth but solid front-end attack and provides chords with a balanced punch.

We also hear a resonance peak that emphases the woody frequencies and adds an expressive quackiness to the impressive sustain. In clean mode, you can play country-style and even pedal-steel licks without diving for the nearest compressor, and overdrive turns the quack into a sweetly grinding bark that's pretty much perfect for rolling rhythms and raunchy soloing.

The neck unit lives up to its billing as being closer to a Strat pickup. There's no hint of mud and, while it has the clarity and sensitivity of a vintage Strat pickup, the midrange has a more hazy harmonic complexity that we find very addictive.

There are two potential downsides – the first that you don't quite get that pseudo-jazz tone that some more vintage-correct Tele sets do so well, even when rolling back the tone control. Secondly, having two equally bright-sounding pickups skews the 'in-between' setting towards Strat-iness rather than the fuller, phasier and more distinct 'both on' Tele tone. Otherwise, it's a wholehearted thumbs up for a another outstanding pickup set from House Of Tone.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

For a similarly clear tone with a twist, why not try out the **TV Jones Starwood Tele Set** ($245)? Alternatives that also sport Alnico V magnets include the **Monty's Guitars Full Monty Tele Set** (£155) and the **Oil City Thames Delta Set** (£115)

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Fantastic neck clarity and frequency range
+ No shrillness
+ Woody, quacky and balanced bridge
+ Chime and twang aplenty

– Strat-like neck pickup tones aren't for Telecaster purists

With an idealised Tele tone from the bridge and a neck that keeps you out of the mud, these pickups are a fantastic alternative option

9/10

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PINEGROVE LEATHER GS25, GS60 & GS61 STRAPS

This rapidly growing UK brand promises boutique hand-made guitar straps engineered with guitars players' needs at the forefront. Josh Gardner straps on...

The Guitar Magazine AWARD CHOICE 9/10

It's amazing how often you'll be at a gig and see an expensive guitar hanging around someone's neck on the most boring or downright unsuitable strap. We get it – there's no shortage of exciting things for us guitar players to spend our money on, but you wouldn't drop a small fortune on a sharp new suit and then pair it with a battered pair of old moccasins, would you? A good guitar deserves a good strap to match, and more importantly, do you really want your pride and joy to be held inplace by something that doesn't inspire confidence?

The subject of inspiring confidence brings us to Pinegrove Leather – a small company based in the picturesque market town of Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire, which has been producing a series of cleverly designed leather goods for musical instruments since 2012.

The world of boutique strap makers is an increasingly crowded one, but Pinegrove founder Rod Boyes believes that he has something that sets his designs apart: real world experience. Rod is a musician with decades of gigs under his (finely crafted) belt, and he brings that practical knowledge to each design, giving rise to the company's 'by musicians, for musicians' mantra. Each Pinegrove strap is hand-made using the highest quality materials, and Rod is so confident in the craftmanship and quality of his straps, he offers a lifetime guarantee for each one.

Pinegrove will be new name to many of us, so we've decided to take a look at three of its most popular designs here – the old-school GS25, the clean and classy GS61, and the eye-catching two-tone GS60.

IN USE

Upon removing the straps from their cotton presentation bags, it's clear Rod's boasts about Pinegrove's workmanship and materials are not idle. The leather is of an exceptionally high quality, and the stitching and build is neat and robust – notably on the red GS60, with its distinctive cream insert and tip.

All three straps have a tanned leather top with a thick cow suede backing for grippiness. As anyone who's been clocked by a guitar slipping on its strap will know all too well, this is important in a gig situation, and all three Pinegrove straps keep things balanced and stable – even with a peskily neck-heavy Firebird.

The fruits of Rod's musician's background are most evidence in the GS25 – this one-inch strap is thicker than many vintage-style examples, making it more reassuring, while it also features a unique leather sheath around the adjustment studs, meaning that the metal bits can't damage the finish on your guitar.

Our pick of the bunch is GS61 – ruggedly understated with its oiled leather upper and gold stitching, the double-padded design is among the most comfortable straps we've ever used – we'd have no trepidation taking on a two-hour set with it.

Our only mild gripe is that all three straps are a little on the short side if you're taller than average, or like your guitar slung low. Thankfully, each Pinegrove strap can be customised to be longer, shorter, and even incorporate wider pinholes to accommodate various strap button designs, should you so desire – nice.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The current king of the boutique strap market in the UK is **Heistercamp**, and the **Bray Tor** (£102), **Bee Tor** (£92) and **Kes Tor** (£95) offer similar vibes in a variety of colours. If leather isn't your thing, US company **Couch** uses old vinyl car upholstery to create eye-catching limited-run guitar straps – prices start at $44, plus postage/duties from the USA

The Guitar Magazine VERDICT

+ Top quality materials and excellent craftsmanship
+ Classic but unique styling
+ Clever player-friendly innovations
– All three straps are a little on the short side for tall players

High-quality straps that blend hand-made feel and precision engineering, with some clever innovations thrown in

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Pinegrove Leather GS25 Guitar Strap

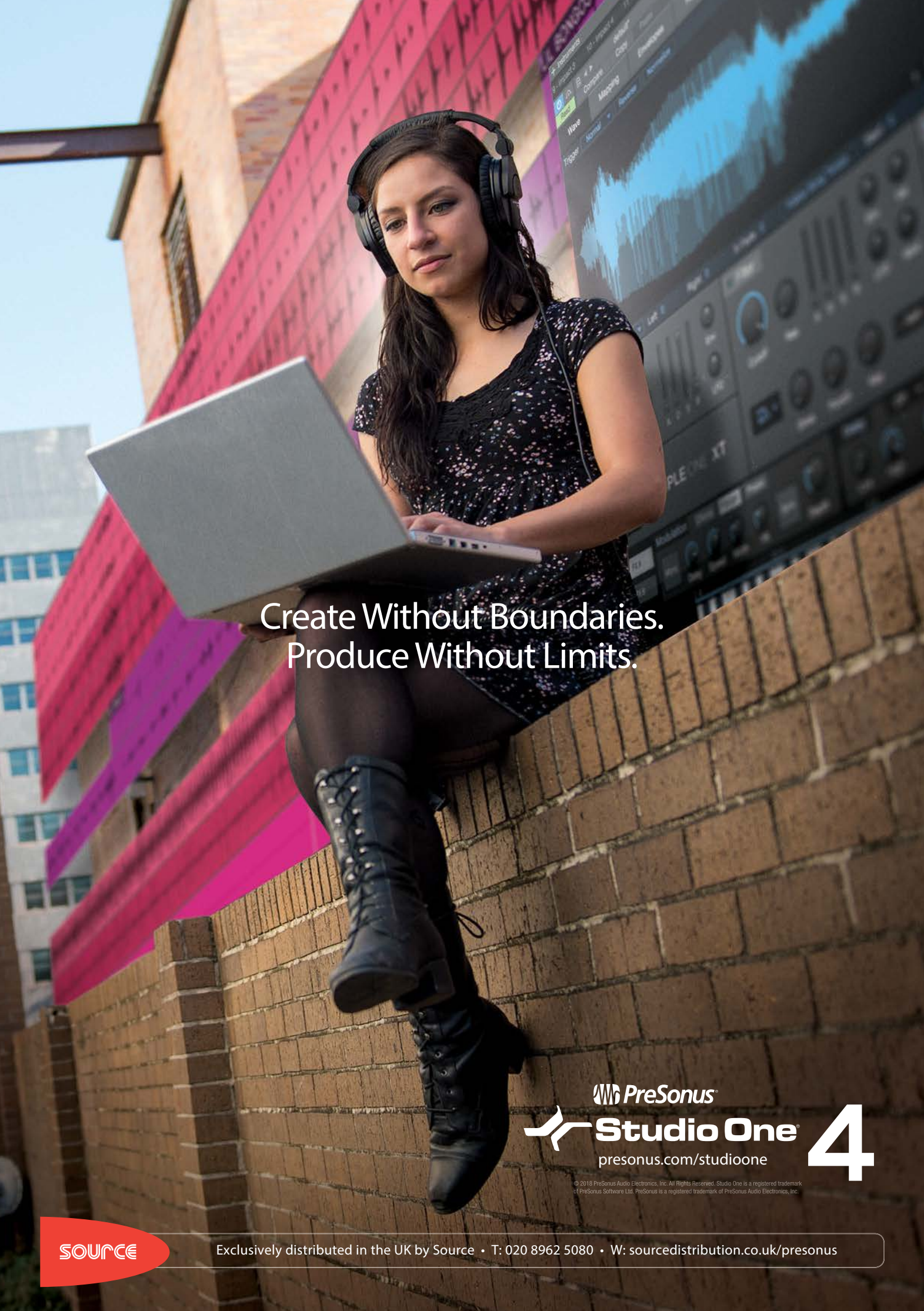
- **PRICE** £59
- **DESCRIPTION** Vintage-style full-grain vegetable-tanned Italian leather adjustable guitar strap with non-scratch secure adjustment system. Made in the UK
- **DIMENSIONS** 41"-55"
- **COLOURS** Black, brown, black/cream stitch, tan/cream stitch (reviewed)

Pinegrove Leather GS60 Two-tone Guitar Strap

- **PRICE** £69
- **DESCRIPTION** Padded full-grain leather adjustable guitar strap. Made in the UK
- **DIMENSIONS** 38"-52"
- **COLOURS** Black/cream, blue/cream, red/cream (reviewed)

Pinegrove Leather GS61 Padded Guitar Strap

- **PRICE** £55
- **DESCRIPTION** Double-padded oiled leather adjustable guitar strap. Made in the UK
- **DIMENSIONS** 38"-52"
- **COLOURS** Cherry red, denim blue, Havana brown, black (reviewed)
- **CONTACT** Pinegrove Leather 07973 154888 **www.pinegroveleather.com**



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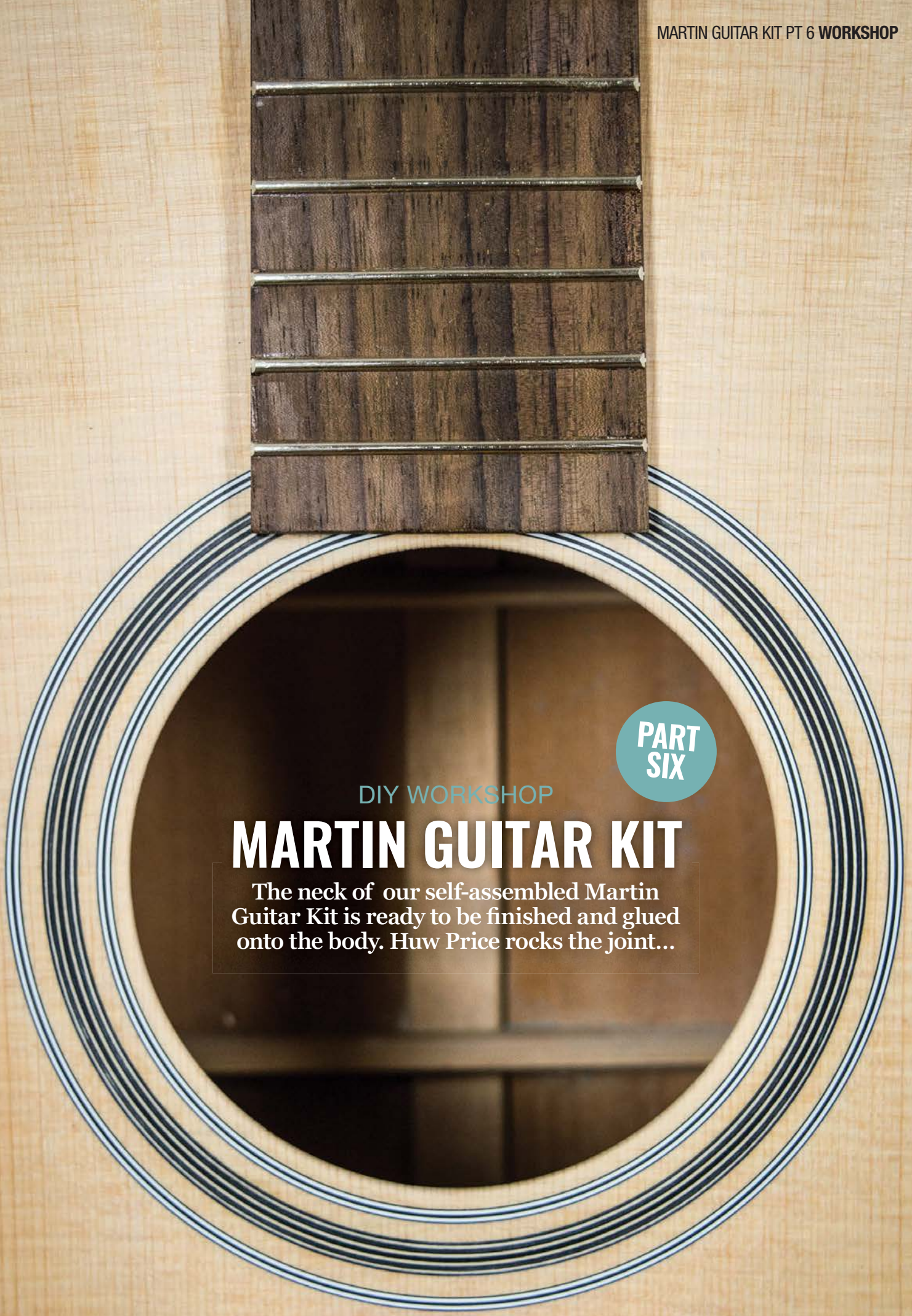


PART SIX

DIY WORKSHOP

MARTIN GUITAR KIT

The neck of our self-assembled Martin Guitar Kit is ready to be finished and glued onto the body. Huw Price rocks the joint...

1 Blue chalk on the neck block shows up on the dovetail to reveal the high spots where wood needs to be removed

I admit that I would've got to this point of our Martin kit build a lot sooner had I not been distracted by making a fingerboard. I'm quite excited at the prospect of finishing the neck and setting it into the body – so let's dive straight in...

ON YOUR MARKS, GET SET

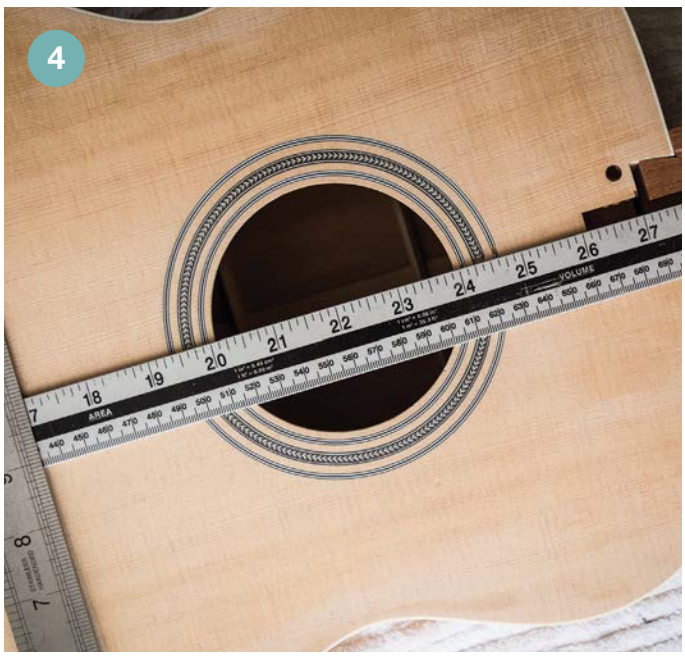
Setting the neck correctly is fundamental to the tone and playability of acoustic and archtop guitars. In addition to conforming perfectly to the guitar's centre line, it has to have just the right amount of back angle to achieve a playable action. Too little angle, and the action will be too high; and too much will require excessive saddle height, and the fingerboard tongue will ramp down like a ski jump beyond the 14th fret.

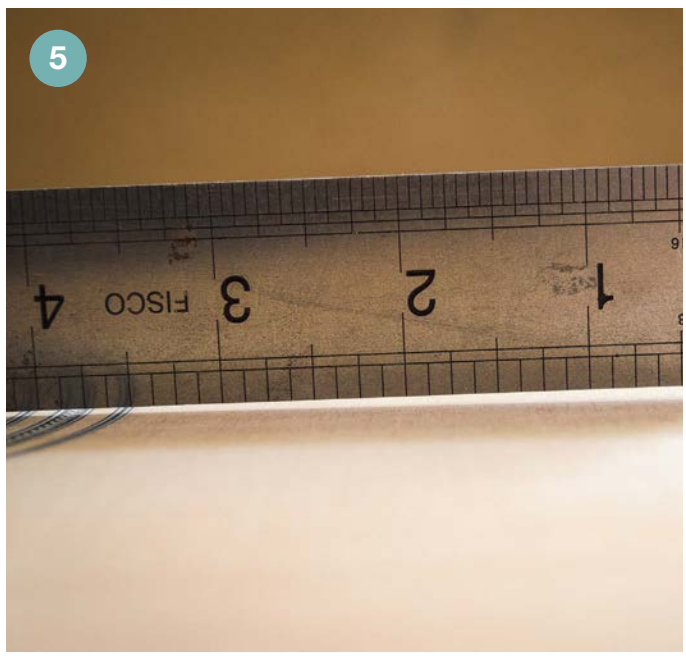
Martin's neck joints are cut on a CNC machine and they're very accurate. The neck drops most of the way into the joint, with about 5mm proud of the top. I apply chalk to the angled sides of the neck block and when I push the neck in and then remove it, chalk marks on the neck's dovetail reveal the high spots. Using a very sharp chisel, I shave wafer-thin slivers of wood away at the high spots and refit the neck. The process is repeated several times, and it goes a little deeper on each test fitting. The fit also gets tighter, requiring a firm tap on the heel to knock the neck back out of the joint.

Eventually, the top of the neck sits about 1mm above the body and attention shifts to the line where the heel meets the sides. There are some small gaps on both sides, so I tap the neck out again, place a strip of 320-grit paper between the heel and the body – with the abrasive side touching the heel – and lightly press the neck back into the joint.

So long as you don't force the neck in too tight, the paper can be pulled out, following the line of the heel. If the paper won't move or it tears, the neck is in too tight and you should tap it out to try again. Also, take care to pull the paper dead straight, or even at a slight angle towards the body, to avoid sanding a curve at the exit point.

After two or three passes, the gap begins to close and I do the same on the other side of the heel. It doesn't take that long before the gaps disappear. If you find that you have gaps in the area where the heel cap will eventually go, take the neck





out and check for a raised section on the heel. You can remove this with a chisel, or by using the paper at a different angle.

Removing the last of the high spots from the dovetail, the neck goes in fully – with a bit of persuasion from a G clamp – and it's time to check all the angles are right. I begin by establishing the approximate bridge position and mark the body's centre line at that point. With the neck's centre line also established, I place a long metal ruler along it and gauge where that line ends up on the body. The neck is fractionally off-centre – by 2mm towards the bass side – but I'm more than content with that.

Taking the same metal ruler, I hold it tight to the neck along its length and extend it over the bridge area. The manual suggests you need a gap of 1/16 inch, but I have found the action ends up a bit too high with that measurement. I'm closer to 1/8 inch and again, I consider that a bit of a result.

With all three of my previous builds, setting the neck was the most difficult and time-consuming process. Each one took me several hours and the results were never perfect. This neck-set took me less than an hour and as I contemplate the next step, unless something goes badly wrong when the glue is applied, I don't think this one will require many excuses...

Since I haven't done this for over a decade, I have to conclude that all the effort that went into keeping the neck block and sides square during the body construction has paid off. I had been apprehensive about this part of the build, but it turns out to be one of the most enjoyable bits so far.

GET ON 'BOARD

I showed you how to radius fretboards when I was doing my Gretsch 6120 conversion (which you can read at www.theguitarmagazine.com), and I do the same here. 180-grit paper is taped to a radius block and the 'board is taped to a flat surface, with runners for the block on each side.

The runners keep the block square and you just keep sanding until you have an even radius all along the fretboard. Later, I swap to 320-grit paper to remove any sanding marks, and I polish up with 1,000-grit sandpaper, followed by ever-finer grades of Micro-Mesh.

2 320-grit abrasive paper is loosely wedged between the body and heel and then drawn outwards

3 After a few pulls on each side, the gaps between the body and heel are eliminated

4 Metal rulers are used to establish that the neck follows the centre line

5 Holding the ruler upright along the neck, a gap in the bridge position confirms the back angle is correct

6 Epoxy glue is used to fit the truss rod, and it's lightly clamped to keep the rod below the top of the channel

Well, I did say I was flying by the seat of my pants – and in guitar building, you only learn by doing. Before radiusing the fretboard, I was concerned I might have cut the fret slots too deep, but they were actually too shallow.

Fortunately, the slots still had sufficient depth to guide my fret saw, so I set the depth stop on the saw so the slots will end up slightly deeper than the tangs of the Martin fretwire, and finish them off without using the mitre block. However, next time, I'll install the marker dots after radiusing the 'board, because I must have come close to sanding through them.

With the dust and debris removed from the slots, I set about installing the frets. There's nothing here we haven't covered previously and everything goes smoothly. Martin's fretwire comes pre-bent, but since I radiused the 'board to 12 inches rather than Martin's usual 16 inches, I run the wire through my home-made wire-bending tool to tighten the curve.

Martin supplies just enough wire with the kit to complete the job, with a little extra that enables you to get three or four frets wrong. When you're cutting the wire, allow for 3mm to 5mm overhang on each side of the fretboard and you should be okay.

I would also recommend getting a good set of end nippers and the one I'm using came from Crimson Guitars. They make a clean cut fairly close to the 'board edge and you can quickly bring the fret ends flush with an edge file or sanding block. After bevelling the fret ends, I set the 'board aside.

SUSS THE TRUSS

Our kit comes with a two-way truss rod, which fits snugly into a slot that's pre-routed into the neck. The instructions are a touch on the ambiguous side, however, because they were written for an earlier-style truss rod, but I find updated instructions stapled to the notes page at the back of the booklet.

Before installation, I verify that the rod is functioning in both directions, and then set it to a neutral position. It's the area where the adjustment bolt feels a bit loose. The rod is installed with its rounded side downwards in the slot, and a test fitting reveals it will end up about 2mm below the neck surface.

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7 A paper cutout is used to select a section of veneer for the headstock

8 A correctly sized and accurately measured template is used to locate the tuner post holes

9 The holes look good, and we can see rolling hills, a river, a rainbow and the sun in the grain pattern *[Have you been working too hard, Huw? – Ed]*

This was normal with the old truss-rod design, and a filler strip was provided to close the gap. However, no filler strip is deemed necessary with the two-way rod. The rod must be held securely in the slot to prevent unwanted vibrations and allow it to function properly. The manual's suggestions are either wood glue or epoxy, and I decide on the latter.

I apply masking tape along the edges of the slot to keep the epoxy away from the mahogany, and mix up some Araldite to line the sides and bottom of the slot. When the rod goes in, I realise it's now sitting above the slot, which will prevent the 'board from seating properly.

I place short lengths of matchstick lengthways along the rod and apply three clamps to press it deeper into the slot. Very little pressure is needed, and I use a paper towel soaked in isopropyl alcohol to wipe away any glue squeeze-out.

OVER THE TOP

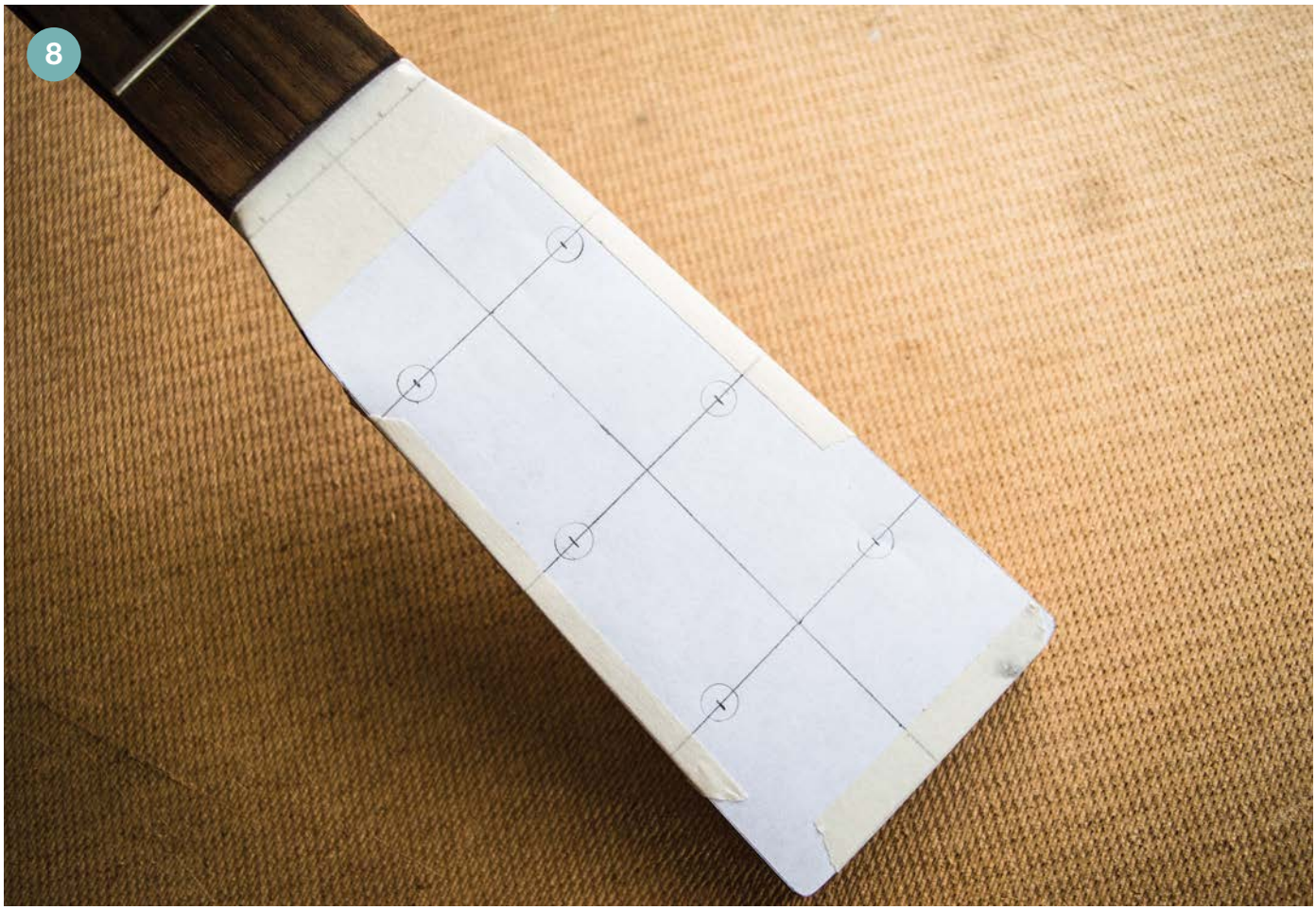
Martin's tradition is to veneer the headstock face, but I'm less than impressed with the piece of black plastic sheet supplied with the kit. Instead, I find a piece of ziricote veneer on eBay.

Similar in colour to rosewood, ziricote often has spectacular grain patterns and I feel it adds visual interest. A paper cutout of the headstock is moved over the veneer to select the section of ziricote I want to use. The veneer is quite brittle and prone to splitting, so I place a piece of masking tape onto it, just beyond my pencil lines, and cut out the piece using a fresh X-Acto knife blade.

With a protective layer of plastic tape on a flat gluing board, I position the veneer and secure it to the board with masking tape lipped 1mm over the top and bottom ends. This holds the veneer flat and prevents it from sliding around. With Titebond Cold Press For Veneer glue spread evenly across the headstock face, I position it over the veneer and apply several clamps to press it down. After a couple of hours, I remove the clamps and carefully sand the excess veneer flush with sides of the headstock.

MR POSTMAN

The kit includes a full-scale template for locating the tuner holes; however, I discover the actual headstock shape differs slightly and the template markings don't correspond with the stated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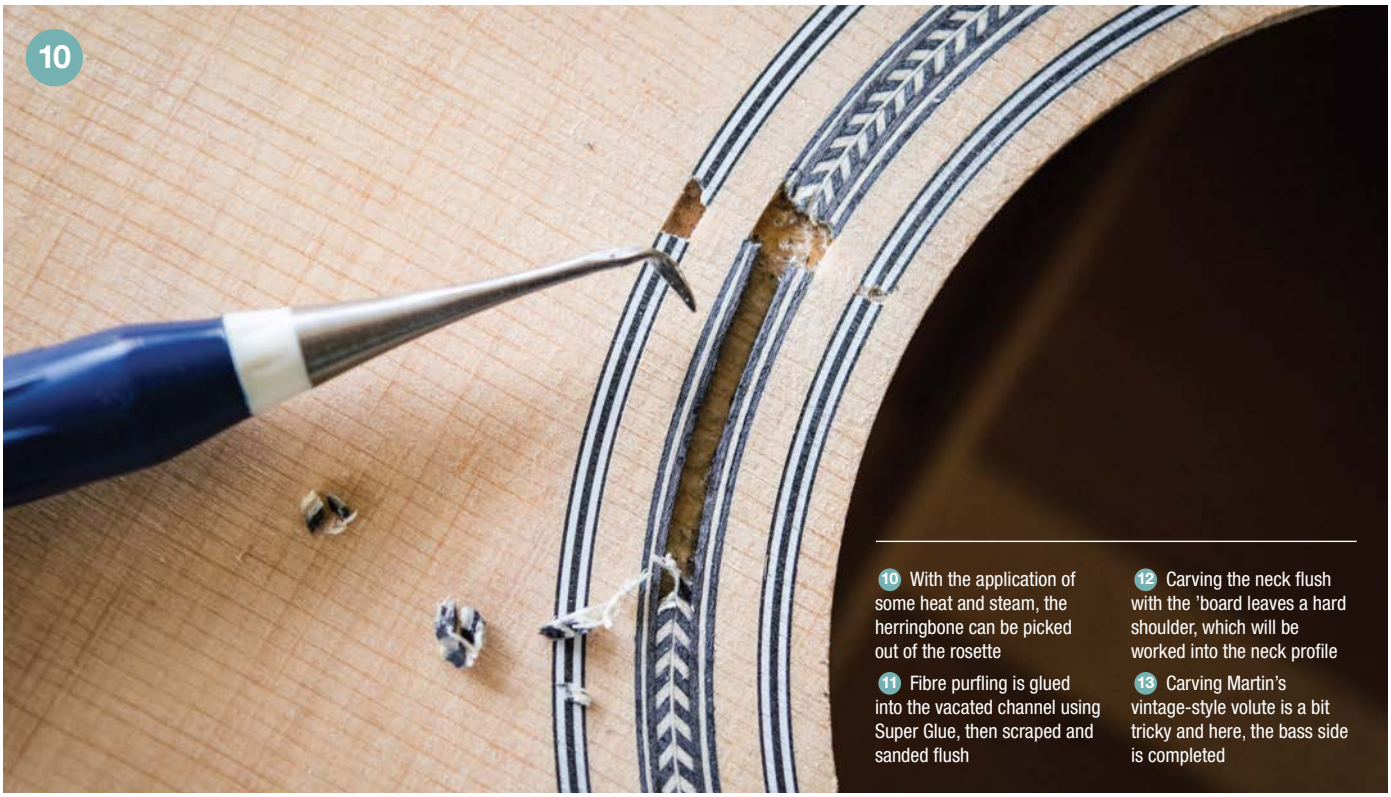


10 With the application of some heat and steam, the herringbone can be picked out of the rosette

11 Fibre purfling is glued into the vacated channel using Super Glue, then scraped and sanded flush

12 Carving the neck flush with the 'board leaves a hard shoulder, which will be worked into the neck profile

13 Carving Martin's vintage-style volute is a bit tricky and here, the bass side is completed

measurements. I decide to make my own template based on the dimensions of my headstock and the measurements shown on the Martin template. Having traced around the headstock and established a centre line, I mark the post positions and verify that each string will run from nut to post unimpeded.

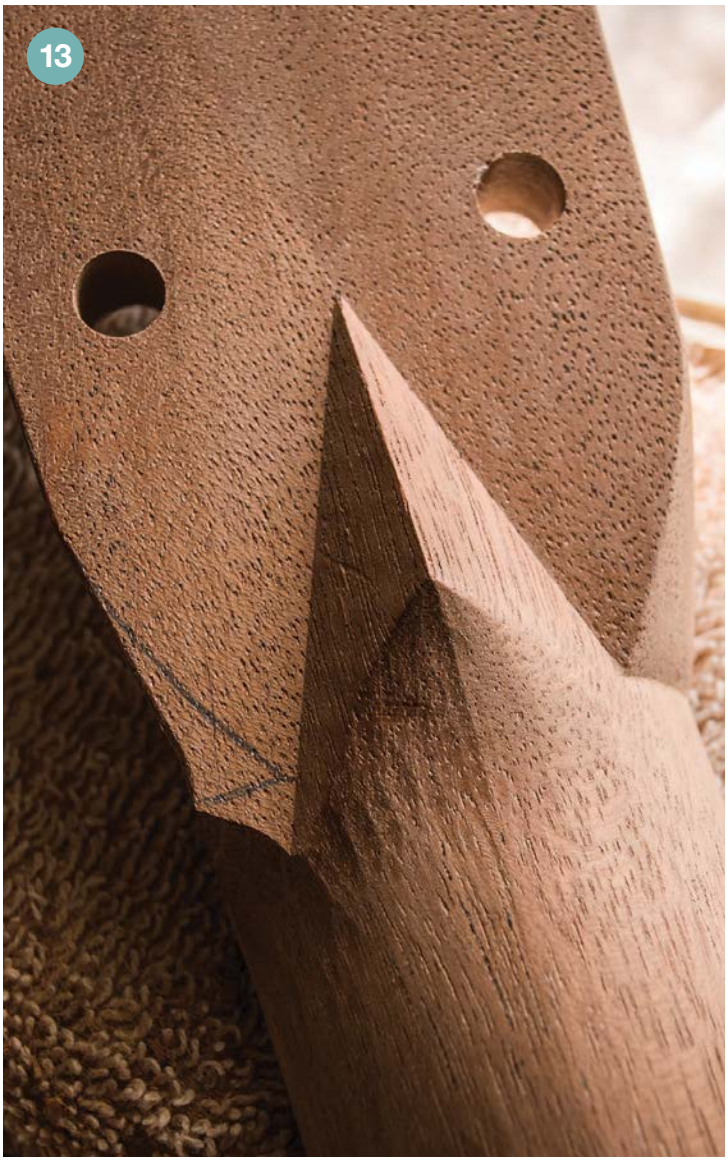
With my template taped to the headstock, a pin nail is placed over each post hole centre and lightly tapped with a hammer to mark the position onto the wood. Using a drill press and an 8mm brad point bit, I drill each hole until the point of the bit just breaks through the back of the headstock.

Flipping it over, I have six tiny holes and I drill back to front to finish the job. Doing it this way prevents the wood from chipping out at the back and I'm left with six perfect post holes.

OFF THE BONE

I was unsure about the herringbone rosette from the start – and as my vision for how I want this guitar to turn out is becoming clearer, it's really beginning to bug me. Herringbone is made from wood, so it seems reasonable to assume Martin uses wood glue to install it.

Wood glues such as Titebond will release when heat is applied, so I decide to see if the herringbone will come out. Using a damp scrap of cotton and a soldering iron set to 275°C, I place the cotton over the herringbone and heat a 1cm section



that I know will end up covered by the fretboard.

After 20 seconds or so, I use a dental scraping tool to pry up the herringbone and I'm pleased to find it pops out cleanly. Better still, the black/white/black strips around the outer edges of the slot remain intact. It's fiddly work, but an hour later, I'm left with a clean and empty rosette channel that I fill with fibre black/white strips from Small Wonder Music. With the excess scraped and sanded flush, the rosette turns out pretty well.

HOT GLUE

Finishing work on the neck and gluing it onto the body are the quickest and easiest of all the tasks featured in this month's workshop. After drilling 2mm holes and using Super Glue on some pearl side dots, I apply hot hide glue to the neck, place the fingerboard onto the index pins and clamp it together overnight. The neck is wider than the fingerboard, so I use a rasp and sanding blocks to bring it flush and soften the shoulder along the line at the bottom of the fretboard. I also carve the area around the diamond volute in the vintage Martin style.

Any remaining chalk-dust residue is brushed off the dovetail and, with the hot hide glue brought up to temperature, it's then applied to the underside of the fingerboard extension and the dovetail.

Working quickly, I press the neck into the body with a G clamp and add three more clamps to the 'board. The neck clamps are left overnight and I now have a guitar that is almost ready for bridge positioning and spraying. But these finishing touches will have to wait until the next instalment...

NEXT MONTH...

Next month we're back onto our Goldtop project as we prep for painting and make some decisions about hardware and parts

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ALL ABOUT... JIMMIE WEBSTER

Much of the iconography of vintage Gretsch guitars came from the company's greatest 'travelling ambassador'. Huw Price taps into the Jimmie Webster story...

Webster was a product demonstrator for Gretsch before he got involved on the design side of things

© Gretsch Guitars

Gibson had Ted McCarty, Fender had Leo, and Gretsch had Jimmie Webster. They were all ideas guys, but Jimmie was that bit different, because he was an accomplished guitarist, but no engineer. Over four decades with Gretsch, Jimmie came up with some of the company's most iconic, weird and notorious innovations. Jimmie was born into a musical family on 11 August, 1908 in Van Wert, Ohio. He grew up playing piano but also developed a keen interest in guitar, and by the 1930s, he was a professional guitarist working with Woody Herman and Count Basie. He also ran a music shop and tuned pianos, and by all accounts was very good at it, because his services were in great demand.

Jimmie had done some work as an agent and demonstrator for Gretsch before the war, even appearing in a 1940 guitar-method brochure with a DeArmond-equipped Gretsch Synchromatic. The brochure described the playing style Jimmie had developed as the 'Gretsch-DeArmond method for electric Spanish guitar'.

TOUCH SYSTEM

Jimmie had attended a DeArmond pickup (or 'mike' as they were then called) demonstration, where tapping strings against the fingerboard to create notes was used to show its sensitivity. He realised that he could adapt his two-handed piano-playing abilities to guitar, and devised an eight-finger playing style based on tapping. Chords were played by hammering on with the left hand to create the rhythm and his right-hand tapped out the melody on the upper frets. Calling it the 'Touch System', Jimmie promoted it for decades and genuinely believed it would eventually become mainstream.

Even with Chet Atkins producing his album *Un'a-bridged* in 1959, Jimmie's prediction of "universal adoption by guitarists everywhere" proved a tad over-optimistic. Listening to the album now is much like listening to early Les Paul recordings. The playing is technically accomplished and inventive, but they sound more like novelty records. By the time Van Halen repopularised tapping, Jimmie had passed away.

GETTING INTO GRETSCH

The Second World War intervened and Jimmie served as a musician in the US Air Corps. He became more involved with Gretsch on his return, but always insisted on

© Gretsch Guitars

The White Falcon is one of Jimmie's most successful creations

remaining freelance, juggling three days per week at Grestch's Brooklyn factory with two days of piano tuning. In 1951, Gretsch held a three-day promotion in New York to launch a new range of electric cutaways to compete with Gibson. Jimmie's role had become that of 'special representative' and he was by then Gretsch's main demonstrator – travelling the US and appearing on radio and television to promote Gretsch guitars and his technique. However, Jimmie wasn't as well known as Les Paul, and he recognised that Gretsch needed a big-name endorser to compete with Gibson.

THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN

In 1954, he approached Chet Atkins, but found him reluctant. Chet was happy playing his modified D'Angelicos, but Jimmie talked him around with the promise of a signature model that he could help design. The 6120 was launched in 1955, complete with DeArmond pickups and Western motifs, which included a 'G' branded onto the body like a prize steer. Some of these 'Western' features had been tried on the 1953/54 Round-Up and Gretsch figured they would be appropriate for the 6120, too. The New York jazz-guitar manufacturer's attempts at countrifying his guitar must have felt patronising to Chet. Country to the core, he had no need for horseshoe and cactus inlays. We can see his point, but many Gretsch fans love the cowboy kitsch. The whole thing has the whiff of Jimmie about it, and he's directly credited with the idea of spraying the 6120 orange.

GLITZ AND GLAMOUR

1954 saw Jimmie's design ideas coming to the fore on other models. Gretsch drums were held in very high regard and when visiting the factory, he noticed the plastic sheet material that was used to wrap drum shells. He suggested covering guitars with it and before long, Gretsch had the sparkly Silver Jet. Gibson was offering gold and black finishes and Fender was only offering solid colours on a custom-order basis, so Gretsch responded with two-tone finishes, yellows, ivory, copper, Cadillac Green, Jaguar Tan, Smoke Green and more. But the most visually arresting of all Gretsches was Jimmie's brainchild.

Jimmie set about designing the glitziest, flashiest and most eye-catching guitar possible. Combining a white finish with gold hardware, 'jewel' encrusted knobs and gold-sparkle binding, Jimmie's daughter Jennifer maintains that her father named the 'White Falcon' after the Forces newspaper he featured in during the war. Released in 1955, the guitar is regarded as the ultimate expression of 50s Gretsch-ness by many fans.

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© The Gretsch Electric Guitar Book by Tony Bacon

Jimmie's two-handed tapping technique was ahead of its time, but he died before others caught on

A PROJECT TOO FAR

Jimmie was so enthusiastic about the Touch System technique that he directed product-design efforts at Gretsch into creating a stereo guitar and amplifier set-up catered for his style of playing. Working with Filter'Tron inventor Ray Butts, a pickup was devised that split the signals from the upper three strings and the lower three and sent them to separate amplifiers. Jimmie called this innovation 'Project-O-Sonic Stereo', for "Stereophonic, BiAural Sound Projection and Disbursement". Various Gretsch models were produced with Project-O-Sonic electronics, including the While Falcon, Country Club and Anniversary. Sadly, it was doomed to commercial failure, because customers had to commit to buying the whole guitar-and-amplifier package and, more importantly, Jimmie's Touch System never really caught on.

GUITARS TO GADGETS

It's reported that Jimmie and some of his Gretsch colleagues took a lot of their marketing ideas from the automobile industry. During the early 50s, car manufacturers would try to maintain demand for established models by introducing new colours and features every year. Keeping things fresh was one of Jimmie's main concerns, and he was dedicated to coming up with new ideas. Gretsch had been buying outsourced pickups and bridges, and Jimmie was keen for those items to be manufactured in-house. He worked closely with Ray Butts to develop a production version of the Filter'Tron humbucker and Jimmie's Space Control bridge replaced the Melita type.

Rather bafflingly for a piano tuner, Jimmie considered it more important for players to be able to adjust string spacing than intonation. Space Controls featured on Gretsches across the product range for years to come, but they can be prone to unwanted noises and have less sustain than Gretsch's bar bridges. Neoclassical thumbnail fretboard markers proved to be one of Jimmie's more successful ideas – these have since become a quintessentially Gretsch feature. His standby switch can come in handy, too, but his padded plastic backs and mechanical string-dampening system are held in lower regard.

> JIMMIE SET ABOUT DESIGNING THE GLITZIEST, FLASHIEST AND MOST EYE-CATCHING GUITAR POSSIBLE – THE WHITE FALCON

The same can be said for T-Zone Tempered Treble, which involved slanting frets beyond the 12th fret to improve intonation and the woeful Tone Twister (aka String Breaker), which was a budget vibrato device with a small lever that clamped across the strings in the area between the bridge and tailpiece.

Jimmie's most notorious 'innovation' was the Floating Sound Unit, which was seen on various models from 1966 onwards. It comprised a three-bar frame positioned where the bridge would normally go. A 440Hz tuning fork was screwed onto the underside and projected through a hole in the top of the body, with the strings threaded through the bars. Designed to improve sustain and enhance upper partials, the unit only works if carefully set up to transfer vibrations to the back of the body. Set incorrectly, the tuning fork sets off all sorts of wolf tones. The unit also made it impossible to set the intonation, and most players simply remove them, reposition the bridge and learn to live with the hole.

LATER YEARS

Jimmie was also around while Gretsch was transitioning to thinner double-cuts with f-hole transfers and is credited with Gretsch's belated move into solidbodies. He also created the seven-string George Van Eps signature. Although not all of Jimmie's ideas proved popular, or even practical, he helped keep the Gretsch ball rolling for many years. Beneath the glitz and gimmicks, most Gretsch models were essentially pre-war jazz guitars. As such, they were already old-school in 1952 and by the mid 1960s, many models were unsuited to the high-volume blues-rock and psychedelia that dominated guitar music.

Jimmie continued working for Gretsch and performing his 'Gretsch Guitarama' shows after Baldwin took over the company, but in time, he began doing less and less, until he eventually drifted away altogether. Jimmie died in 1979, just before the revival of interest in Gretsch guitars, but one thing's for sure – without Jimmie Webster, the Gretsch brand as we know it today wouldn't exist.

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FUNKY VOICINGS

Using extended chords from the last few months we come up with some funky four-note voicings. Rod Fogg gets on up...

Over the last few months we've look at extended chords such as ninths, 11ths and 13ths and found that to play these chords effectively on the guitar, some notes need to be left out. The fifth is usually the first to go, but at the end of last month's Chord Clinic we also omitted the root from a few chords. The thinking here is that the bass player is probably laying down a solid groove outlining the root notes of the harmony, leaving us free to play the interesting notes with some four-string chord voicings.

Figure 1 gets us started with a simple two chord groove, taking a ninth chord shape from C9 to F9. On this occasion we've left the bass notes in, so play it one chord to a bar in any rhythm you choose and then play it again without finger two, muting the note on the A string with the tip of your first finger. Notice the lighter texture this produces. If you have a looper or recording software you could record a bassline on the lower strings of the guitar to go with these chords on the top four strings.

Switching to the key of E, it's a cool trick to keep the top note of a two chord groove the same. Check out figure 2, which keeps the same note (B) at the top of both an E9 and A13 chord. Funky strumming usually involves a mixture of strummed notes and dead notes. This means releasing the pressure with your fret hand but not taking the fingers off the strings, producing a percussive, pitchless sound. For inspiration, listen to Nile Rodgers, or Leo Nocentelli's playing with The Meters.

You don't have to use ninths and 13th chords to play in a funky style. Nile Rodgers, often plays simple major and minor triads; figure 3 makes use of plain seventh chords. Either of these chords could be moved around in the style of figure 1, sliding up and down the guitar, but it is more interesting to switch shapes, producing a G♯ leading to an A on the top string. If you worked out a bassline to go with figure 2, it will work with figure 3 as well.

Two-bar grooves are very common in funk guitar, but that does not mean you have to only use two chords. In figure 4, the Cm9 and F9 chords occupy one bar, and the B♭maj7 is

Figure 1

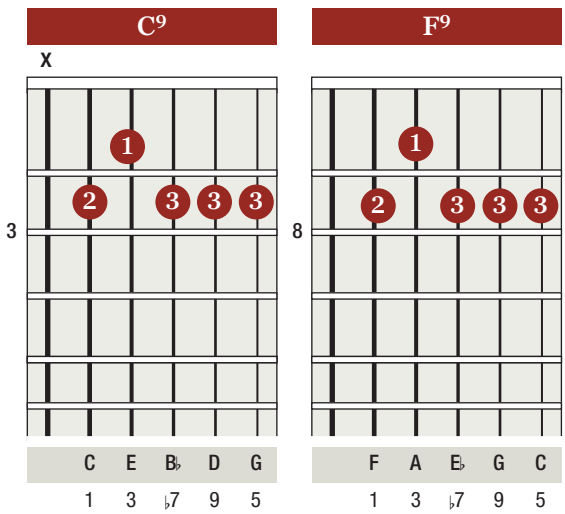


Figure 2

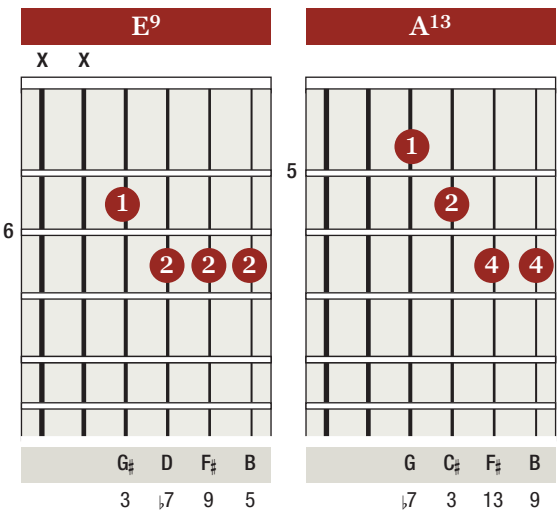


Figure 3

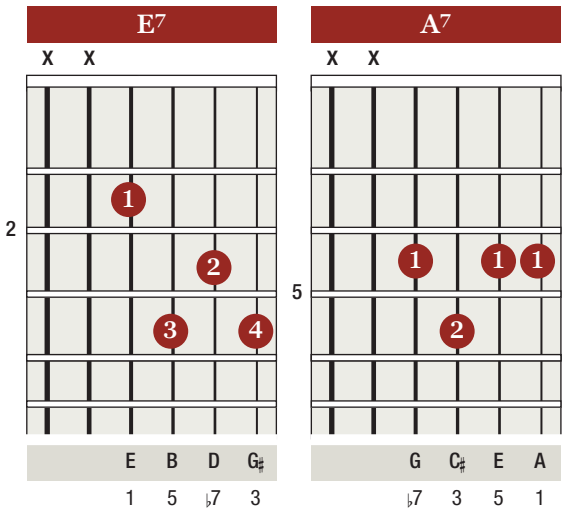


Figure 4

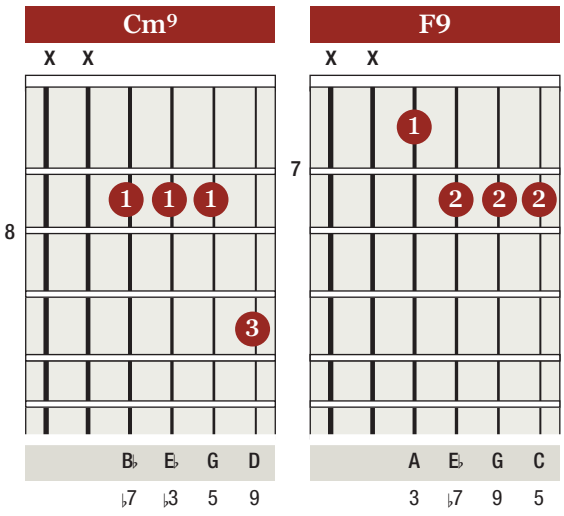


Figure 4 (cont)

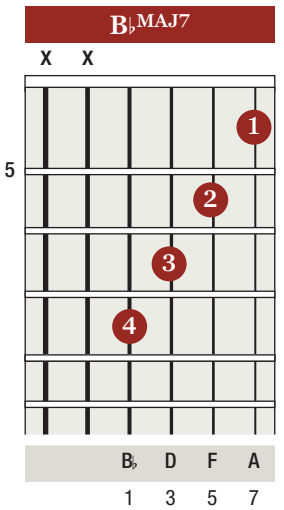
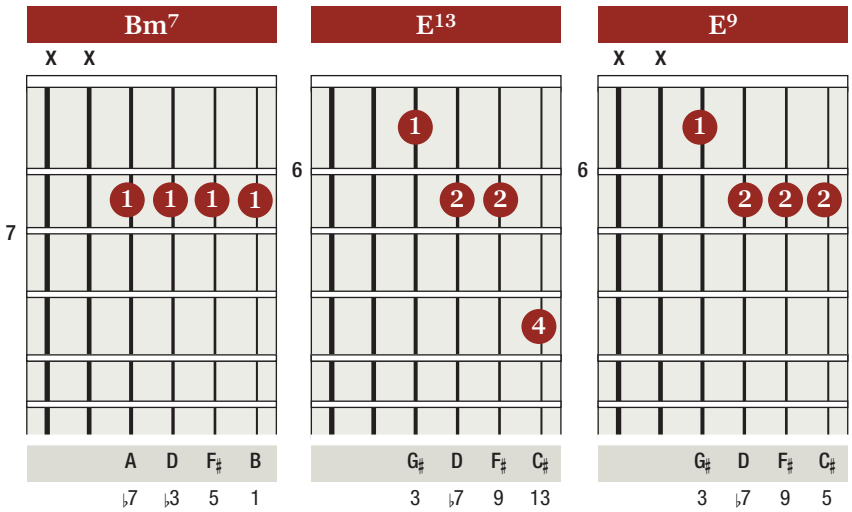


Figure 5



played for the second bar. Minor ninths work well followed by dominant chords, making a progression known as a II-V. This example is inspired by The Spinners *It's A Shame*, and is in fact a II-V-I. As an experiment, you might be able to modify these shapes, putting any missing root notes back in.

In figure 5 we try shifting between E13 and E9 in the second bar, having played the Bm7 chord for the first bar. If you can hear hints of Catfish Collin's playing on James Brown's *Get Up (I Feel Like Being A) Sex Machine*, track it down and see if you can figure out exactly what's going on in that guitar part.

Some grooves stay on one chord, and this is where inversions are your friends, as you can come up with an interesting guitar part based around different positions of the same chord. Cue figure 6, which looks at three different ways of playing a D♭9 chord. Play the first two chords in one bar, then a bar of the third chord. That should cycle around nicely, especially if you come up with a funky D♭ bassline to go with it.

Figure 6

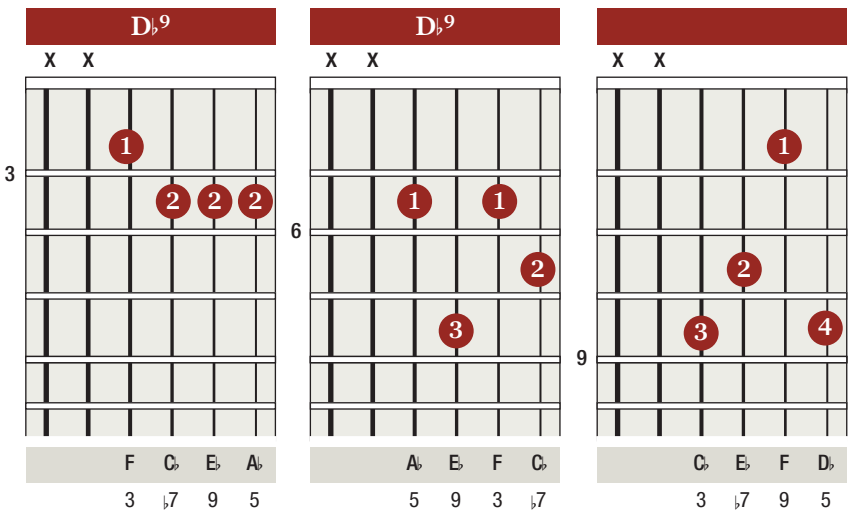


Figure 7

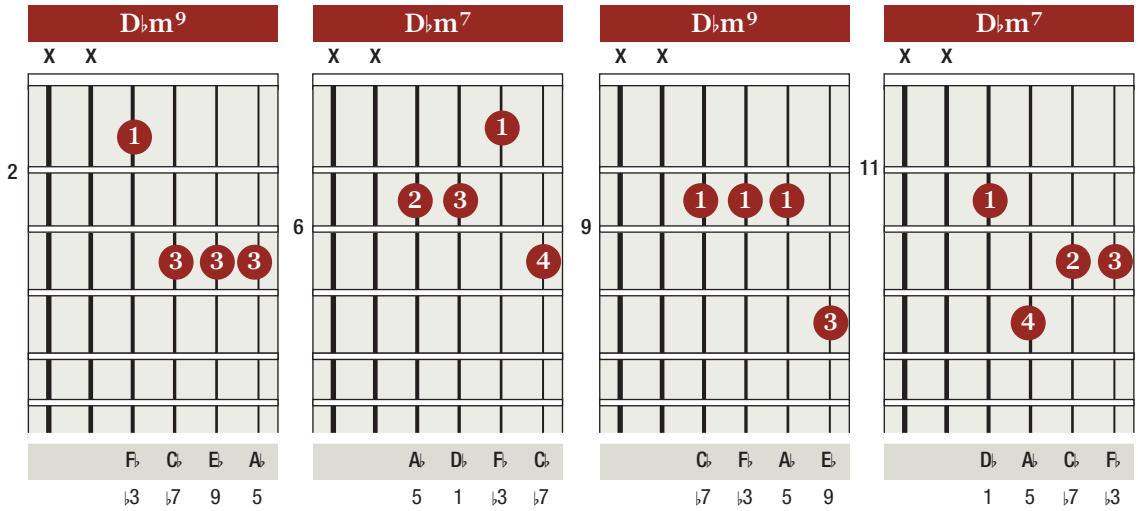


Figure 8

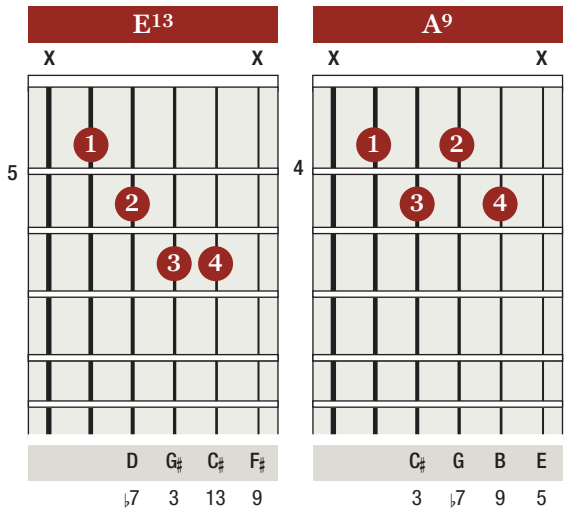
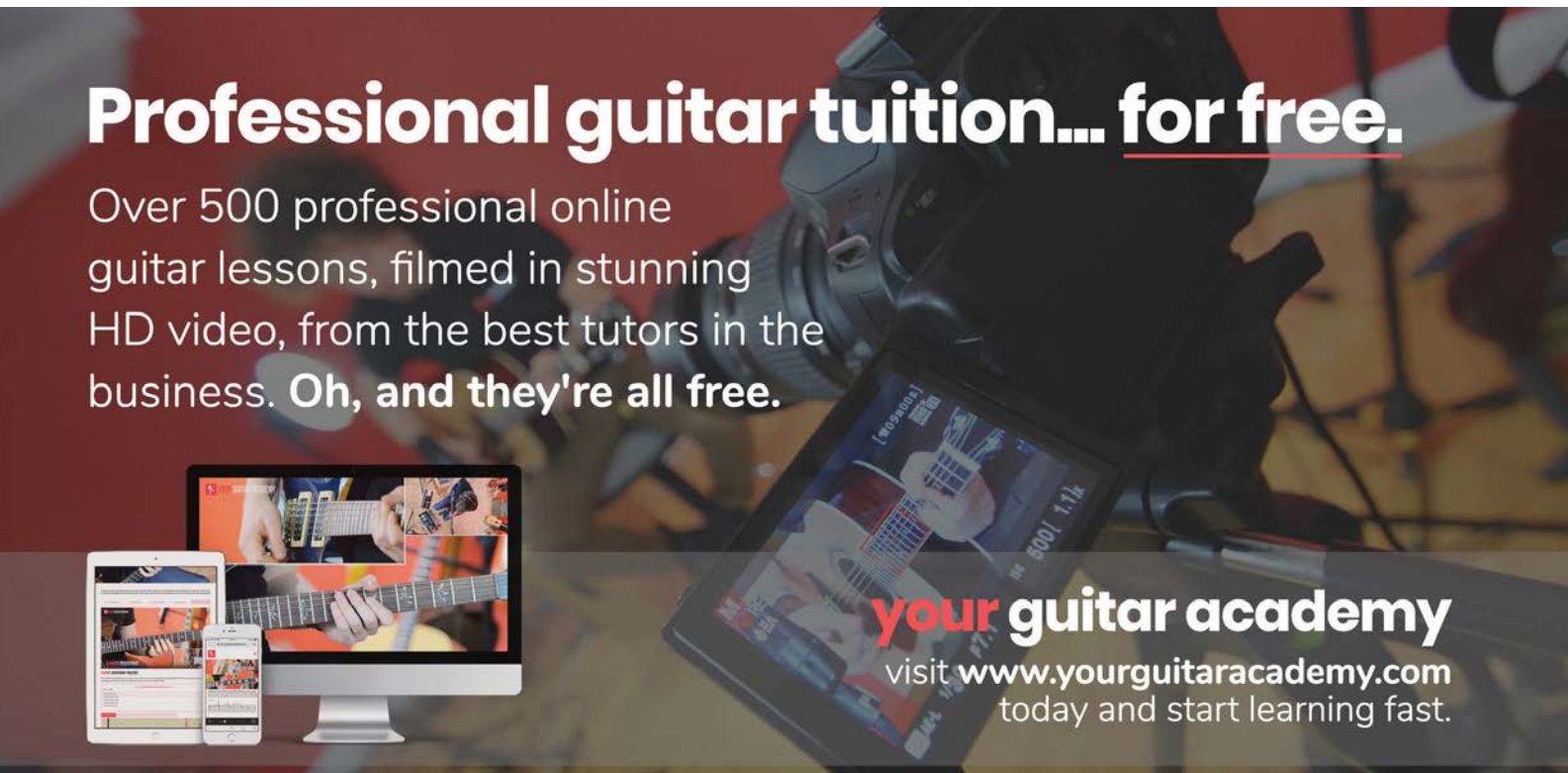


Figure 7 repeats the same idea as we saw in figure 6, but this time with chords in D♭ minor. D♭ minor is the same as C♯ minor but we've stuck with D♭ so you can compare these chords to those in figure 6. You can play all four, or just grab any two and groove around switching back and forth.

Finally, figure 8 takes our two-chord groove over to the inner strings for some mellow low-voiced E13 and A9 chords, once again with the root notes here supplied by our hard-working bass player.

You might find it better to lay off the percussive strumming on this one, holding down the chords for a bar each and strumming them in a more soulful style. Watch out though, here comes the sax solo... Meanwhile, don't forget that you can't fake the funk, and we'll be back next month with some more groovy chord stuff.



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MIKE VENNART

The former Oceansize frontman, Biffy Clyro touring guitarist and solo artist on Squier Strats and tripping drummers...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"My beaten up Squier Strat that my ma bought me when I was 11. I've had many guitars since, but that one will always feel and sound the best."

2 In another life I'd have been...
"Well I went to a shitty school in a shitty area, but music moved me to Manchester. Had I stayed in the suburb of Leeds where was from, I dread to think..."

3 The moment it all started...
"My older brother was hugely into metal and so I looked to him for guidance. He was a huge Status Quo fan. You forget what an important band they were in the late 70s. I loved them, and it was Rick Parfitt in particular that struck me at the age of maybe six. His playing was incendiary. His picking hand was absolutely brutal, and he just looked like such a badass. Such an incredible rhythm player. Quo were my first ever concert, aged seven. They were so loud I was kinda scared of them. I was lucky enough for to see the reunited Quo in 2013 and, whaddyaknow, they were still punishingly loud. I love them."

4 The one that got away...
"I'm kind of a hoarder. I've only sold a couple of guitars on, and while I do miss gazing at them, I can accept that they had to go. Maybe they played a little uncomfortably, or sounded a bit crap. I'm still a bit of fetishist though. All those years as a kid, not being able to find a good left-handed guitar, or having severely restricted options, that's made me a little crazy in my later years because now I just want them all!"

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"It's difficult to think past playing a show with the drummer off his head on hallucinogens..."

6 The best advice that I've ever been given...
"When I first started playing in front of people, at school assembly, I'd get a little shaky and my ma would always calm me down by saying, 'Pretend I'm the only one watching'. To this day, there's certain parts of the Biffy Clyro set that are kinda just me on my own, and to avoid falling apart, I think of my ma. To be honest, the emotion of just that is enough to cancel out the fear. My ma was always so supportive when I started playing, and still stands side of stage when I play Donington or Reading with Biffy."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"A load of legato waffle, probably in Dorian or Lydian. Or *Grounded* by Pavement, which is one of my favourite songs. It's definitely my 'habit riff'. If I'm trying to impress I'll bust out a load of whole tone licks to con people into thinking I'm even a fraction as talented as Allan Holdsworth."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"It has to be red wine."

9 My guilty pleasure...
"I guess Iron Maiden. I grew up listening to them, saw them live for my 12th birthday, loved them with all my heart, then I kinda outgrew them when I discovered the weirder stuff. When they reformed with Bruce Dickinson around 1999 I slowly gravitated back, in a nostalgic, 'Oh this'll be good for a laugh' kinda way. But when I saw them live as a grown man, I just totally surrendered. They're a truly exceptional band. In fact, they're so much more than a band. You cant say that about anyone else."

10 If I could just play one thing...
"Most of my own songs! [laughs] Amazingly, Oceansize, was supposed to be a power trio. We got Steve Durose in on guitar because I knew my singing/playing-simultaneously were pretty lacking. They still are! So we overcompensated by getting a third guitarist, and that became our sound. So yeah, I wish I could play my own songs by myself!"

Vennart's new album, *To Cure A Blizzard Upon A Plastic Sea* is out 14 September on Medium Format

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